WEAPONS

Written by

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OVER BLACK

MADDIE - 11 years old - speaks in the low hushed tones of a campfire tale.

MADDIE (V.O.)
This is a true story that happened right here in my town two years ago. A lot of people die in a lot of really weird ways in this story but you won't find it in the news or anywhere like that because the police and top people in this town were like so embarrassed about not being able to solve it that they covered everything all up. But if you come here and ask anyone they'll all tell you the same thing that I'm going to tell you now. This story starts at my school.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - DAY

Maybrook elementary stands proud in its little suburban plot. Yellow buses unload throngs of kids in the morning rush.

MADDIE (V.O.)
Maybrook elementary is kindergarten through fifth grade and every grade is split into two classes. So two first grades and two second grades and like that. So this one Wednesday is a normal day for the whole school. There was this one class of second grade... or third graders. Third grade kids. And they had this teacher who was new. She was teaching there for her first year. Her name was Justine Gandy.

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - DAY

HALLWAY: We follow JUSTINE (30s) as she makes her way through the river of youthful chaos. We don't see her face, but we can feel her good mood. She likes these kids.

MADDIE (V.O.)
It was a Wednesday and she was going to her classroom just like every morning. But this day was different.

JUSTINE reaches a classroom door and steps into...

CLASSROOM: The room is EMPTY.

MADDIE (V.O.)
This day, none of her kids were there.

She moves to her desk and drops her bag. We stay behind her observing the rows and rows of unoccupied desks. It's eerily quiet here after the mayhem of the hall.

MADDIE (V.O.)
Every other class at that school had all their kids. Even the other third grade class that Mrs. Belt taught was full. But Mrs. Gandy's room was totally empty. Well... not *totally.*

The camera slides to reveal a LITTLE BOY, ALEX sitting at a desk that Justine's body was blocking from view.

MADDIE (V.O.)
There was one boy there. His name was Alex Lilly and he was the only kid in a class of eighteen that came to school that day. And do you know why?

The camera pushes past Justine toward Alex. He looks neither sinister or innocent. Just blank.

CUT TO BLACK.

MADDIE (V.O.)
He was the only one there because the night before at 2:17 in the morning, every other kid in Mrs. Gandy's third grade class woke up...

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - NIGHT

BEDROOM: An unlit, empty child's bedroom. The red alarm clock by the bed reads 2:17.

MADDIE (V.O.)
...Got out of bed...

Pan from the bed to the open door.

LIVING ROOM: Pan from the staircase through the living room.

MADDIE (V.O.)
...Walked downstairs, opened the front door...

Pass through the front door to the empty dark lawn.

MADDIE (V.O.)
...walked across the front yard and into the dark... *And they never came back.*

CUT TO BLACK.

George Harrison's *Beware of Darkness* begins.

MONTAGE: A series of super wide shots of SUBURBAN HOMES lit by moonlight and street-lamps. Each shot lingers on the house - still and calm, until the FRONT DOOR OPENS and a CHILD EMERGES.

Every child RUNS ACROSS THE YARD with the same CURIOUS POSTURE - body erect, ARMS OUTSTRETCHED in a downward V like someone holding heavy bags. They run like the naked Vietnamese girl covered in napalm from that iconic photo.

We watch 17 DIFFERENT HOUSES and 17 DIFFERENT CHILDREN make their escape into the dark that George is warning us about.

WEAPONS

BLACK

MADDIE (V.O.)
All the parents and people at the school were really sad and upset.

MONTAGE: Various shots of FRANTIC PARENTS speaking with POLICE in their yards/bedrooms/etc.

MADDIE (V.O.)
The police looked everywhere. They could tell that the kids all left at 2:17 because like half of the houses had alarms that got tripped when they walked outside. Some of the kids even got videoed by the houses that had cameras. But the cameras only showed the kids walking out into the darkness.
(MORE)

MADDIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
They didn’t show where they went after that.

MONTAGE: Empty school hallways. Empty classrooms. Empty playgrounds. Empty parking lots.

MADDIE (V.O.)
The whole school took like a bunch of days off so they could do a big investigation. The big question that no one could answer was ‘why?’. A lot of the kids in other classes were friends with the kids who went missing but they all said that none of those kids ever told them what they were gonna do.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Push through crowded halls with busy detectives.

MADDIE (V.O.)
The police talked to Alex a lot. They asked him why his classmates did what they did but he told them he didn’t know.

OFFICE: Push in on ALEX on a sofa between his parents. Two detectives lean forward peppering him with questions.

MADDIE (V.O.)
They asked him if there was a plan that all the kids discussed the day before but he said if there was he never heard it. They asked if there was a tv show that all the kids watched where someone ran away like that but he said that if there was he never saw it.

STATION: Move through another busy bullpen.

MADDIE (V.O.)
They didn’t just talk to Alex.

PUSH IN on the door to an INTERROGATION ROOM.

INTERROGATION ROOM: JUSTINE sits opposite two detectives.

MADDIE (V.O.)
They also talked to Mrs. Gandy a whole bunch but she also didn't know anything and couldn't help them. She said everybody was acting completely normal up until that day. She had no idea what could have happened.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - DAY

The school sits empty. No cars in the lot. No activity.

MADDIE (V.O.)
For almost a whole month they kept the school closed while they did their big investigation but after a while they had to open everything back up so the kids that didn't disappear could learn again.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - NIGHT

MATCH CUT: The parking lot is full of cars. People file in.

MADDIE (V.O.)
One night before they did, they had a big meeting at the school with all the teachers and all the parents. There were a bunch of counselors and people like that to help everyone figure out how to feel and how to be sad together I guess. This is where the story really starts.

CUT TO BLACK.

JUSTINE

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

JUSTINE sits in the front row, clenching her jaw, eyes on her lap. The STRESS of the last weeks is plastered all over her.

On stage, a COUNSELOR in a tweed coat addresses the room.

COUNSELOR
What's important is that we don't judge our grief.
(MORE)

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)
There's not a right or a wrong way to grieve. We might experience emotions that we don't like. Emotions besides just sadness. It's important not to judge ourselves when we feel emotions like anger. Anger is a very healthy part of the grief cycle. It can be especially powerful in instances of abandonment. There are often--

MAN (O.S.)
What does that mean?

Heads turn as ARCHER (40's, Powerful) rises.

COUNSELOR
I'm explaining that--

ARCHER
Especially powerful in... in instances of *abandonment?* Are you saying we should be upset with *Matthew* for what happened to him?

COUNSELOR
I'm saying it wouldn't be abnormal to--

ARCHER
Cause I'll tell you right now that *you* might call what happened abandonment but *I* don't. I don't see it that way!

Grunts of approval from others.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
I see something that doesn't make any sense *at all*. We're talking about *seventeen* kids. In *one* classroom. And *none* of them talked about it? And we got forty parents in here and *none* of us saw it coming? I wanna know what happened in that classroom! Why just her classroom? Why *only* hers?

OTHER PARENT
Yes!

COUNSELOR
I'm picking up a lot of emotion, and that's--

ARCHER
So you'll forgive me if I'm not particularly interested in hearing any more out of you. I want to hear from Justine Gandy! She's *here!* I wanna know exactly what she was doing in *there!*

JUSTINE shuts her eyes and takes a deep breath.

-- JUSTINE stands at the podium before a sea of angry expectant faces.

JUSTINE
I... First I want to just say how *very* sorry I am for all of... what's happened. I know there's nothing I can say to make this better. The truth is, I want an answer just as bad as all of you. I *love* those kids. I know it's--

PARENT
Why was it only your class?

JUSTINE
... I know it's not the same as how you love them but... believe me I really loved those children and I've spent every waking moment since... that day asking myself what could have happened. I wish I had some insight or explanation but I just don't have one. I just--

OTHER PARENT
How can that be possible?!

MAN
You have to know something!

PARENT
She should be locked up until she tells us what happened!

PRINCIPAL ANDREW (50's, gentle) pats JUSTINE on the shoulder and steps in front of the podium.

ANDREW
OK, now that kind of thing is really not called for. I'm serious. Mrs. Gandy is here as an affected member of this community and she's hurting just like all of us--

PARENT 3
You’re either negligent or complicit!

PARENT
She’s a suspect!

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - NIGHT

JUSTINE hurries to her car, flanked by the COUNSELOR and ANDREW. Behind them angry parents spill from the school.

PARENT
Where are our children?

PARENT 2
You’re just going to leave?

Andrew turns to head them off.

ANDREW
That’s enough. Everybody needs to give us some space.

JUSTINE reaches her car and gets in. The COUNSELOR leans down, holding her door.

COUNSELOR
Do you have anyone you can stay with tonight?

She shakes her head and shoves the keys in the ignition.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)
Then I’d recommend going straight home and laying low. This feels like it could turn--

She yanks the door shut and starts the engine.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

Justine steps from her car and walks through the parking lot toward a liquor store. She eyes a few people milling about at the end of the lot but they don’t notice her.

A HOMELESS MAN named ANTHONY stands by the entrance.

ANTHONY
‘Scuse me miss, you spare any change? I’m trying to get on a bus to meet my brother in--

INT. LIQUOR STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Justine moves through the aisles to the rear of the shop. She knows exactly where she's headed.

She snatches a bottle of vodka and heads back toward the counter when her phone rings. She digs it out.

JUSTINE
Hello?

Only breathing.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Hello?

More breathing. Justine stops.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Who is this?

VOICE
You better watch your FUCKING--

She hangs up, rattled.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Justine steps timidly from the store, fully paranoid.

ANTHONY
Ma'am. I'm trying to catch a bus to get to my brother in Portland. You spare anything?

She's too focused on a DARK FIGURE in an IDLING PICKUP TRUCK across the street to answer.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Really anything helps.

JUSTINE
Sorry.

She moves toward her car.

EXT. JUSTINE'S HOME - NIGHT

Justine cuts the engine and checks her mirrors. NO PICKUP in sight. Just a quiet suburban street.

She steps from her car and moves up the yard toward her door. She spots a COUPLE walking toward her from down the block and she picks up the pace.

INT. JUSTINE'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

LIVING ROOM: She enters and locks the deadbolt immediately. Without turning on the lights, she moves to the window and peers through the curtains.

She waits until the couple enters her view. In a few moments they amble past without a glance her way.

She exhales.

LATER: CU on the TELEVISION. SHARK TANK is on and some idiots are pitching bullshit.

KITCHEN: Justine moves about the kitchen fixing herself a stiff vodka soda when...

DING DONG.

She freezes. Listens.

TELEVISION (O.S.)
So what do you say sharks? Who wants to *dive in* with us and make summer vacation... *a day at the beach?*

She takes a few timid steps to the edge of the kitchen and peeks through the living room to the front door.

DING DONG.

TELEVISION (CONT'D)
OK, I like this because I have kids and every time we go to the beach it’s always a big production getting them to put on their--

She turns it off.

JUSTINE
Hello?

No sound but the clock on the mantle.

She moves closer to the door.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Yes?

No answer.

She takes a final step and looks through the peephole.

POV: Empty porch. No one.

She moves to the window.

POV: Nothing. Empty porch. Empty street.

She sighs and lets go of the curtain.

She makes her way back to the kitchen, grabbing the remote off the--

BANG! BANG! BANG!

She startles, drops the remote and wheels around.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Jesus fucking-- WHAT??!

No sound.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
WHO'S THERE?!

KITCHEN: She digs through a junk drawer and pulls out a little can of PEPPER SPRAY.

LIVING ROOM: She strides to the front window, pissed now.

She yanks back the curtain.

No one on the porch. No one in the yard.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
OK, FUCK YOU!

EXT. JUSTINE'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Justine throws open her front door and strides out.

No one in sight. She scans the block and then she sees it.

Her CAR. Someone PAINTED its side in big SLOPPY RED LETTERS:

W-I-T-C-H

She stares.

EXT. JUSTINE'S HOME - DAY

The sun is up and a hungover Justine scrubs the 'WITCH' with a large soapy sponge but it's not coming off.

She steps back and sighs. *Fuck it.*

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

The 'witch-mobile' sits parked in a crowded lot, sticking out like a sore thumb.

ANDREW (PRE-LAP)
It's actually an exceptional package because it's going to cover you through the summer break as if you were still on full time.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Justine sits across the desk from PRINCIPAL ANDREW.

ANDREW
And that was never going to be something you'd be doing this year. So that's really good.

She forces a smile.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
What's important is that you use this time to take care of yourself. Right?

JUSTINE
Right.

ANDREW
You're gonna keep your health insurance and if you don't mind me saying, there's a lot of mental health specialists on the plan. Some of them are very--

JUSTINE
I just need to work, you know? I just need to fill my days with... I need to work.

ANDREW
I sympathize.

JUSTINE
Even if I were just substituting here and there when the need arises. I wouldn't even mind--

ANDREW
Justine, the scene last night was just proof that we have a lot of emotional parents here. People aren't being rational. And the fact is right now... you are a lightning rod.

JUSTINE
Will I have my job in the fall? Can I... Can I come back then?

ANDREW
Let's worry about the fall in the fall. For now I think it's best if you keep some distance from this place until folks have time to sort themselves out.

She looks out the window at children on the playground.

JUSTINE
How is Alex? Is he--

ANDREW
Alex is doing well. He's in Mrs. Belt's class and we've been advised that the best thing we can do for him is to keep him on a routine. Keep his life as normal as possible.

JUSTINE
But is he doing alright?

ANDREW
He's quiet.

JUSTINE
He was always quiet.
(earnest)
I'd like to speak with him.

ANDREW
Justine. We've had this conversation before. That's out of the question.

JUSTINE
I'd feel so much better if I could just--

ANDREW
Right there! That's the problem. *You'd* feel so much better! I *just* explained to you that the best thing for Alex is that we try and keep his life as normal as possible. He's been scrutinized by the press. He's had investigators ransack his house. He's been *traumatized*. Let's try and put Alex first, yes?

JUSTINE
If you are implying that I don't care about--

ANDREW
The issue isn't you caring or not caring. The issue here is that you have established a bit of a pattern in which you overstep professional lines with the students.

JUSTINE
Oh my God. Here we go. I do not over--

ANDREW
You know that it's not appropriate to hug students.

JUSTINE
Forgive me! I hugged a crying little boy. Lock me up!

ANDREW
You know that *driving a student home* is not professional.

JUSTINE
She missed the bus! She lived close to me!

ANDREW
It's *not* appropriate!

Andrew takes a breath.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Justine I know all of this comes from the fact that you care. I know that you obviously aren't a threat to these kids. But you have to realize that you aren't a parent. You are a teacher. There's a difference. And for that reason, *no* you cannot talk to Alex Lilly.

JUSTINE
It's just...

She searches for it.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
We're the only ones left.

Andrew's face says it all: *Not happening.*

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

Justine walks to her car amidst the end of day rush as kids push into minivans and load onto buses.

In her wake we catch a couple of icy stares from adults and pointed whispers from children.

IN HER CAR: Justine sits and watches the children. An unexpected wave of emotion hits her. She fights the urge to cry when...

She spots ALEX drifting silently amongst the flow of kids, head down, alone in the crowd.

Justine leans forward, melting at the sight of him until he steps onto a waiting bus and is gone.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Justine stands in the parking lot behind an officer who squats and rubs at the paint on her car.

OFFICER
Yeah that's really on there huh?

JUSTINE
I've been receiving phone calls as well. Threatening ones.

OFFICER
Oh yeah? Think the caller might be responsible for this?

JUSTINE
I don’t know. Maybe, maybe not.

OFFICER
Probably kids did it if you ask me. Hell, I used to do stuff like this when I was in school. Tee pee houses. Ding dong ditch. Never wrote ‘witch’ on a car but a buddy did smear some of his own--

JUSTINE
I don’t think it was kids.

Across the lot she sees ANOTHER OFFICER, PAUL (30s, Large) getting into his squad car. They LOCK EYES and share a loaded beat. He WAVES AWKWARDLY. She half waves back.

OFFICER
Well whoever it was, best we can do is file a report. Hard to say if insurance will cover it. If you’d seen whoever did it in the act we could file it as a level 2--

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Percy Sledge’s *At the Dark End of the Street* plays as Justine sits at the bar, nervously sipping a vodka soda. PAUL ENTERS and makes his way over. She brightens and stands.

JUSTINE
Hey! *Hey, hey, hey!*

PAUL
Can we hug?

JUSTINE
Of course we can hug. Jesus.

They do, but it’s awkward. They sit. She notices his right hand is bandaged.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
What happened to your hand there?

PAUL
Oh... Just, stupid work accident thing. Nothing.

JUSTINE
Drink?
(waving at bartender)
Tony?

She half stands to get his attention.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Tony?... He'll be here in a sec.

PAUL
It's fine. Not in a rush.

Beat.

JUSTINE
So... Thanks for coming.

PAUL
Yeah, no. I'm glad you texted. I've been thinking about you a lot. I wanted to call but I wasn't sure if... that was appropriate or...

JUSTINE
Of course it's appropriate.

PAUL
OK yeah, no, I just didn't know if calling was gonna be helpful or...

JUSTINE
Jesus Christ you could just call and if I don't feel like talking I just don't answer.

PAUL
OK.

JUSTINE
I'm not like some little... delicate flower that would wilt if I saw your name pop up on my phone.

PAUL
I get it. Sorry, I should have called.

Justine waves again at Tony but he's not seeing her.

JUSTINE
He'll be over here in a second.

She hits her vape. He fidgets.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
What would you have said? If you had called?

PAUL
I don’t know. I don’t know what I would have said. Just that I’m thinking about you and... anything I can do, you know.

JUSTINE
Uh huh.

PAUL
What’s going on? How are you?

JUSTINE
I’m shitty. I’m like completely shitty.

PAUL
I’m sorry to hear that. I can’t even--

JUSTINE
Tony! Hey! My friend wants a drink.

Tony sidles up.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Go ahead.

PAUL
Hi. Uhhh... I’ll just have a coke.

She rolls her eyes as Tony steps away.

JUSTINE
A *coke?*

PAUL
Yep. A Coke.

JUSTINE
OK. Fine, whatever.

PAUL
I’m sorry to hear you’re shitty. What’s going on? I mean, obviously I know what happened with everything but what’s going on with you after? What’s happening?

JUSTINE
I'm basically fired. They have me on leave until next year.

PAUL
Until next year? Doesn't sound that fired.

JUSTINE
Everybody thinks I'm a witch.

PAUL
I don't know if *that's* true.

JUSTINE
Go look at my car.

PAUL
I hope you didn't *drive* here.

JUSTINE
Why do you hope...

She leans back and stares at him, reproachful.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Don't be an *asshole*, Paul.

PAUL
I'm not being an asshole. I'm concerned for you.

JUSTINE
I don't need your fucking concern! *I'm not drunk!*

PAUL
OK. Got it. So what, someone vandalized your car?

JUSTINE
They wrote *witch* across it. So yes, for your information everybody does think you're a... think *I'M* a witch. So yes.

Tony returns with his coke.

PAUL
Thanks.
(beat)
I had a bit of a day.

JUSTINE
Oh yeah?

PAUL
I fucking lost it on this dude. This junkie asshole just pushed my buttons in the exact wrong way today and I--

JUSTINE
Yeah, but your job is dealing with people who are ready to hate your guts just because... you're *you*. I didn't ask for any of this shit.

PAUL
I don't ask for this shit.

JUSTINE
Yes you do, you put on that uniform and drive around looking for it.

PAUL
Can I give you a little--

JUSTINE
Tough love?

PAUL
No just... Some thoughts from someone who knows you very well.

She stares at him: *Go ahead, shoot.*

PAUL (CONT'D)
Get out of your own head. People aren't all thinking about you. The whole town isn't aimed at you.

JUSTINE
I think you might actually be wrong about that.

PAUL
You have a tendency to get a little ...*woe is me.*

JUSTINE
Wow.

PAUL
And a little paranoid, and one thing that I know has never helped is *this.*

JUSTINE
What's *this?* What?

PAUL
A lonely drinking pity party.

JUSTINE
(big fake smile)
I'm not lonely, *you're* here.

PAUL
You know what I mean. And I can't stay.

JUSTINE
(mischievous)
Donna know you're here?

PAUL
No.

JUSTINE
Really?

PAUL
We're not... Happening right now.

JUSTINE
Wooooooowwwwwww.

PAUL
It's not a big deal.

Justine smiles, genuine this time.

PAUL (CONT'D)
You're ridiculous. Oh my God! `
Look at you. You're beaming!

JUSTINE
Have a real drink with me!

PAUL
Justine.

She leans in, flirty and smiling.

JUSTINE
Have a real drink with me! Come on!

He stares at her.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Pleeeeease?

INT. JUSTINE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Justine sits in a loose t-shirt on a chair by her dresser. She smokes a cigarette and stares off camera.

REVEAL: PAUL asleep in bed. He stirs, eyes her and rolls the other way.

PAUL
How can you smoke this early? It's disgusting.

She smiles, takes a puff and blows it at him.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Gross!

INT. CAR - DAY

Justine drives and Paul rides shotgun.

JUSTINE
What do you got going on today?

PAUL
Work. Working.

JUSTINE
How's work?

PAUL
It's fine. It's whatever.

JUSTINE
Wow. Hope that's not the general vibe over there.

PAUL
What are you talking about?

JUSTINE
Well there are seventeen missing children out there and I'd like to think that the people in charge of finding them aren't like *'whatever'* about their jobs.

He sizes her up.

PAUL
OK first of all, I'm not a detective, I don't know if you know that.
(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)
Second of all, I'm hungover as shit. I didn't realize I was getting grilled on the investigation.

JUSTINE
I'm not trying to grill. I'm just wondering where things are, that's all.

PAUL
Is *that* why you wanted to see me? Is that what this is?

JUSTINE
No! Paul I wanted to see you because I *wanted* to see you. I'm just asking now about this cause... I'm just *asking* about it.

She pulls into the bar parking lot and stops behind his car.

PAUL
We're on it.

JUSTINE
You're on it?

PAUL
Yep.

JUSTINE
OK well what a load off. You're on it.

PAUL
Why are you coming at me like this?

JUSTINE
I don't know because I'm sick of being public enemy number one around here! And I don't see that changing until somebody gets some answers! So forgive me for taking an active interest! Am I supposed to just solve this caper myself?

Paul takes a deep breath.

PAUL
I know this has to be really hard for you and I know it can be...
(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)
a *challenge* for you to sit still but right now you really need to take it easy. We're not slacking. We're *on it.* You just... hibernate. Take care of yourself. Catch up on some TV. Leave the investigating to the investigators.

She nods.

JUSTINE
OK.

PAUL
OK? Good. It was great to see you.

JUSTINE
You too.

He smiles awkwardly and gets out of the car. She watches him unlock his truck.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Suck my dick.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Once again, Justine sits behind the wheel, across the street from the school as kids flow toward their buses/cars.

She scans the tide of little heads until she sees ALEX moving quietly through the crowd like yesterday.

EXT. STREETS - LATER

Justine follows the SCHOOLBUS past suburban homes.

It rolls to a stop and Alex disembarks.

She parks and watches him make his way down the block.

MOMENTS LATER: She follows on foot as Alex heads toward the last house on the block.

Unlike its neighbors the LAWN HASN'T BEEN MOWED in over a month. The WINDOWS are CURTAINED SHUT, and the car in the driveway is COATED IN DUST.

As ALEX crosses the yard and ascends the steps, the DOOR SWINGS OPEN and a MAN stands in the dark of the entrance.

Justine can't see him well from here, but he appears DISHEVELED with messy hair and wrinkly untucked clothes.

Alex slides past him and the man pulls the door shut.

She stares at the house. *This feels off.*

MOMENTS LATER: Justine rings the doorbell. No response.

She rings again and presses her ear to the door.

Nothing. She steps back and looks at the nearby window but the curtains are drawn.

JUSTINE
Hello?

She steps off the porch and sees another window has NEWSPAPER TAPED OVER THE GLASS.

Intrigued, she moves around to the side of the house. She steps through the tall grass and rounds the corner moving along the tiny side-yard.

Another window taped over with newspaper. She moves to it and sees a SMALL GAP between the newspaper and the frame.

She presses her face to the glass and peers inside.

POV: The room within is dark and cluttered. At first she can only make out the dim shapes of furniture. A dining room table off to one side, stacked with dishes and boxes, a television on a small cabinet. Trash strewn around the floor.

Then she sees it...

On a SOFA in the center of the room sit an ADULT MAN AND WOMAN. Their posture is rigid and they're completely still.

Justine gasps and steps back KNOCKING over a RAKE beside her that lands with a LOUD CLACK.

She freezes, holding her breath. Hesitantly she moves her face back to the window.

The couple on the couch HAVEN'T MOVED an inch. *There's no way they didn't hear her.*

Justine backs away and turns toward the street to leave.

INT. JUSTINE'S CAR - LATER

Justine drives through town on her phone.

JUSTINE
...and I'm telling you that something very very wrong is going on in that house.

Beat.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Hello? Did you hear what I said?

ANDREW (O.S.)
I heard you. I'm just struggling to comprehend this call. We had a conversation where I explicitly told you *not* to interact with Alex.

JUSTINE
Well technically I didn't interact with him--

ANDREW (O.S.)
You followed him home? You rang his doorbell repeatedly and then spied through a window?

JUSTINE
Can we focus on the fact that there's something--

ANDREW (O.S.)
Justine if I wasn't clear with you about Alex before, let me do so now. I want you to *leave him alone*.

Beat.

JUSTINE
I'm sorry Andrew but I consider the welfare of a child more important than your marching orders. Why were his windows taped up? Doesn't that seem strange to you?

ANDREW (O.S.)
Probably because nosy people take it upon themselves to walk up and peek through them! Here's the bottom line. Alex has been traumatized enough by the events of the last two months as I'm sure you have--

JUSTINE
Andrew--

ANDREW (O.S.)
--which is why I'm going to do you the courtesy of *forgetting* that this phone call ever took--

EXT. STREET - LATER

Justine parks in front of a liquor store.

INT. LIQUOR STORE - CONTINUOUS

Justine enters, nods to the clerk and makes her way down toward the rear of the store. She doesn't notice a WOMAN IN A BRIGHT RED JUMPER step in after her.

As Justine slowly winds her way down the aisles, we can tell that the woman in red is not shopping. She's FIXATED on JUSTINE and moving with purpose.

Justine pauses, looking for her favorite bottle when the woman closes the distance, GRABS HER BY THE HAIR AND SHOVES HER to the ground.

JUSTINE
Aaaahhh!!

She rolls to face this woman who stands over her, quivering with rage, mascara running down her cheeks.

DONNA
You fucked him?!

Recognition hits Justine.

JUSTINE
Donna...

DONNA
You *fucked* him?

JUSTINE
I didn't--

DONNA
Yes you did! I know you did!

Donna snatches a BOTTLE OF VODKA from the shelf and TWISTS THE CAP OFF.

JUSTINE
He said you weren't together!

DONNA
LIAR!

She holds the bottle upside down POURING the VODKA onto her.

JUSTINE
Stop!

DONNA
You got him drunk! He was trying to be nice and you got him drunk!

CLERK (O.S.)
Hey! None of that!

JUSTINE
Donna stop!

Donna continues pouring like a maniac.

DONNA
Look what you did!

The CLERK arrives and pulls Donna back.

Justine sits in shock, SOAKED in vodka.

INT. JUSTINE'S HOME - NIGHT

LIVING ROOM: CU on a vodka poured over ice.

Justine sips a stiff one on her couch as garbage plays on TV.

STAIRCASE: She stumbles her way up the steps.

BEDROOM: We push in through the door on her ASLEEP IN BED.

Something’s off. Menacing score rises.

Push tighter on her face.

FLASH: A STUDENT at their desk SMILING at camera.

Justine twitches, troubled.

FLASH: ANOTHER STUDENT smiles at us.

Justine furrows her brow, the dream taking hold.

FLASH: ALEX LILLY staring into the camera with an expression of pure horror.

Justine opens her eyes, catches her breath and then sees something above her. She gasps...

POV: A WOMAN looks down at her from above. The ceiling surrounds her waist as if it was a pool of water that she was standing in, UPSIDE DOWN. She's craning her neck 'up' to look down at Justine and her face is CAKED IN BRIGHT MAKEUP - garish eyeliner and lipstick. She wears a BRIGHT GREEN RUNNING JACKET and large gold earrings. Gravity has no effect on her and her hair frizzes out and down her shoulders.

She rubs her palms together and SMILES with a manic PREDATORY GLEE at Justine who can only gasp in mute terror.

Justine blinks and the woman is gone.

She sits up in bed, breathing heavy. Alex's panicked face flashes once more in her mind.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - LATER

POV: In a CAR SIDE MIRROR we see ALEX walking home.

Justine steps from her little white car with the big red letters as he approaches.

JUSTINE
Alex! Hi.

Alex freezes, eyes wide with alarm. Not the warm reception she was hoping for.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
How are you?
(beat)
I wanted to say hi cause... I've been thinking about you a lot and I wanted to make sure you're OK.

ALEX
I'm OK.

JUSTINE
Yeah?

He clearly doesn't want to have this conversation.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Cause I know this has been a really hard time for me and I can't imagine how it must have been for--

ALEX
I have to go.

He walks past her toward his house.

JUSTINE
Hey. Hang on please.

He doesn't stop.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Alex! I just want to make sure you're alright! I just want to make sure everything at home is--

Alex whirls on her.

ALEX
DON'T FOLLOW ME!

She freezes, startled. Alex turns and jogs across the yard. The front door is opened by the SAME MESSY ADULT.

Justine gathers her resolve and follows him.

-- She rings the bell once more.

JUSTINE
Hello? It's Ms. Gandy. I'd like to talk to you.

She knocks on the door.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Hello?

Nothing.

-- **HOURS LATER:** The sun is setting. She sits slouched behind the wheel, SWIGGING from her BOTTLE, watching the house. A SOCCER MOM walking a dog passes by and she lowers her drink.

-- **HOURS LATER:** It's full dark. The neighborhood is silent. Justine SLEEPS at the wheel. We watch her deep breathing for a beat and then the camera slowly slides, rotating behind her to bring the HOUSE into view through the windshield.

After a long beat the FRONT DOOR OPENS.

For another beat nothing happens. And then...

A FIGURE emerges and crosses the yard. As they pass under the street lamp, we can tell it's a WOMAN with a RAGGED DRESS and messy TANGLED HAIR.

She walks briskly and directly at us with her ARMS OUT AT HER SIDES at an unnatural angle, as if she were holding two large pieces of invisible luggage. She advances until she comes to a stop outside Justine's window.

The figure stands just outside the door but her head is out of view.

She seems to be studying Justine who sleeps on, oblivious.

The woman moves to the rear of the car out of sight. The camera holds on Justine but we hear shuffling off screen and then...

CHUNK. The unmistakable sound of the PASSENGER DOOR OPENING, then the sound of ragged breathing as she SITS INTO THE CAR.

We hold on Justine's sleeping face for a beat and then a pale FILTHY HAND enters frame holding a large, dangerous looking PAIR OF SCISSORS.

The scissors reach slowly toward Justine's unconscious head and for a moment we're certain something dreadful is about to happen, but then...

SNIP. The hand cuts a large chunk of JUSTINE'S HAIR that lands on her shoulder.

The hand recoils from frame and then reappears without the scissors, PLUCKS UP the HAIR and withdraws once more.

CUT TO BLACK.

ARCHER

INT. ARCHER'S HOME - MORNING

BEDROOM: Archer (40's) is a very large man in a very small bed. The room he's sleeping in belongs to a 10 year old boy. Posters of athletes and television shows line the walls. Toys clutter the tabletops.

The door opens slightly and his WIFE pokes her head in.

WIFE
I'm going to work.

Archer opens his eyes but makes no reply. She doesn't wait for one. She leaves.

He sits up and rubs his face. His eyes land on a PHOTO on the desk of HIS SON'S LITTLE LEAGUE TEAM. 14 boys in uniform flanked by Archer and another smiling coach.

He lifts the photo, focusing on his child, MATTHEW, smiling at the camera.

KITCHEN: Archer sits at the kitchen island watching his LAPTOP. On screen is FOOTAGE from his front door RING CAMERA.

For a beat it's just a nighttime shot of the yard and street beyond. Then in the foreground, the DOOR SWINGS OPEN and MATTHEW, in pajamas, trots down the porch and into the yard.

He RUNS WITH HIS ARMS OUT AT HIS SIDES in the same unnatural posture of the woman who cut Justine's hair. He moves in a straight line across the grass, past the sidewalk and into the street. In a few more steps he's swallowed by the DARK.

Archer PAUSES the footage and stares at the darkness. He REVERSES it. Matthew is sucked back into view, toward the camera and disappears into the house.

He PRESSES PLAY and watches his son run away once more.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - LATER

Archer emerges from his F150 and strides toward a HOUSE UNDER CONSTRUCTION. Workers bustle around and we can tell his presence is acutely felt. He's the boss.

A man in a hardhat approaches with a friendly nod.

ARCHER
Why is the tarp still on the roof?

FOREMAN
Shingles haven't come yet.

ARCHER
I thought Pete ordered those things on Friday like I asked.

FOREMAN
He said they're backed up. Supply chain something.

ARCHER
Well he needs to do some hunting. We can't have the tarp on the roof next week or we're gonna--

Archer stops.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
What the fuck is happening with the door?

FOREMAN
What?

ARCHER
The front door there!

FOREMAN
What?

ARCHER
It’s red!

The foreman studies it.

FOREMAN
What’s the problem?

ARCHER
They wanted plum. That’s red. Jesus fucking... Marco, do you ever look at your email? I can’t be the one to catch these things. That’s what I pay you for.

FOREMAN
OK. Sorry boss.

Archer fumes.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)
You OK boss?

ARCHER
I’m fucking fine.
(catching himself)
I’m fine. Sorry.

FOREMAN
We’ll change the color. No problem. Plum. I’ll have Barry take the paint back today and--

ARCHER
I’ll take it. It’s fine. Just make sure Pete gets that roof done. OK?
(beat)
How’s the electric coming along?

LATER: Archer drops two heavy cans of RED PAINT into the bed of his truck and slides in the driver's seat. His face is pure tension as he fires up the engine.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Archer sits in the FRONT LOBBY. Officers file in and out. A handcuffed man with a bloody head sits nearby. ED (50's Captain) emerges from the back hall.

ED
Mr. Graff.

Archer stands.

INT. CAPTAIN'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Archer sits across the desk from Ed.

ED
We follow up with every one of those calls. I can assure you that as we speak we have officers aggressively pursuing every lead that comes through this station.

ARCHER
What about the feds? They got nothing new?

ED
There continues to be a very healthy information exchange and so I can tell you with full confidence that they are also pursuing every lead aggressively.

ARCHER
What's happening with the K9 units? I haven't heard about any K9 reports in a long time.

ED
That's because they don't report to you. Mr. Graff I understand your passion and I don't mind having these conversations with you because, God forbid if it was my child, I'd be demanding answers too. But I need you to trust me that we're--

ARCHER
She’s still not talking huh?

Ed sighs. He was hoping to avoid this line of talk.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
She *knows*.

ED
I disagree with that.

ARCHER
You’re aggressively following up on every lead? And yet she’s just... walking around free as a bird. I mean have you done *any* looking into her whatsoever?

ED
Extensively, yes we have.

ARCHER
Well then you know about her past? *Huh?* Cause I did some digging and I found a whole lot. Did you know she was expelled from her first college for substance abuse? Hmm? She had a DUI? Did you know she was let go from the last school she taught at for *inappropriate behavior?*

ED
With a member of the faculty.

ARCHER
She’s a troubled person!

ED
What is it you think she knows? What do you think it is she’s not telling us?

Archer stares out the window and seethes.

ED (CONT'D)
Those kids walked out of those houses. No one pulled them out. No one forced them. I don’t see anything whatsoever that points to that woman.

He studies Archer.

ED (CONT'D)
What do you see that I don’t?

Archer eyes him. He’s about to fire back--

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Archer stands in the audience at the PTA meeting. We’re up close with him now, unlike last time this scene played out.

ARCHER
I see something that doesn’t make any sense at all. We’re talking about seventeen kids. In one classroom. And none of them talked about it? And we got forty parents in here and none of us saw it coming? I wanna know what happened in that classroom!

OTHER PARENT
Yes!

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Archer moves with the tide of an angry crowd after Justine.

ANDREW
That’s enough. Everybody needs to give us some space.

As Justine gets into her car, Archer veers from the flow. He hops into his pickup and starts the engine.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Archer cruises in his truck, laser focused on Justine’s car half a block ahead of him.

She pulls into a liquor store and he parks across the street. He watches as she exits her car and walks to the door of the shop, ignoring ANTHONY asking her for change.

EXT. JUSTINE’S HOME - LATER

Archer sits in his truck at the end of the block watching Justine tote her bag of booze into her house.

Pan back from him in the cabin and land on the buckets of red paint in the flatbed.

EXT. FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Grainy footage of the yard. Matthew striding into darkness.

KITCHEN: Archer sits at his kitchen island nursing a beer and watching the video. Rewinding it. Watching it again.

BEDROOM: Archer wakes in his son's bed. He sits up.

The room around him is dark and silent.

Push in on the PHOTOGRAPH of his son's little league team. Archer leans in and studies it, brow furrowed.

Archer rises and moves to the photo, lifting it from the desk. The CHILDREN are MISSING. It's just an image of him and another coach on either side of an EMPTY SPACE that should have fourteen kids.

His breathing quickens and he sets the photo back on the desk. He turns and sees...

HIMSELF asleep in the bed.

He looks to the clock. 2:17

The BEDROOM DOOR OPENS abruptly. Archer turns and stares at it. No one is there. But then he hears...

FOOTSTEPS. Descending the staircase.

ARCHER
Matthew.

UPSTAIRS HALLWAY: Archer emerges from the bedroom and reaches the top of the stairs just as the footsteps finish their descent.

DOWNSTAIRS: Archer descends the steps quickly, fully alert. He moves into the kitchen.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Matthew?

He hears the turning of a deadbolt and rushes to the mouth of the kitchen to see the FRONT DOOR SWING OPEN on its own.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

He exits the house and spots MATTHEW in the yard trotting away from him, ARMS OUT AT HIS SIDES like the video.

ARCHER
Matthew!!!

He runs after his child, across the yard and into the street.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Stop!

Matthew traverses the opposite yard and darts between two houses, ENTERING A DARK PATCH OF FOREST. Archer flies across the lawn and pushes into the woods.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Matthew!

He presses deeper and deeper into the woods, and soon it’s almost pitch black.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Wait!

Archer pushes through the tree line only to find himself on another lawn facing an empty street across which is, impossibly - HIS OWN HOUSE.

As he struggles to comprehend how his house could be here, on the wrong side of the woods, he spots MATTHEW running up the front yard and INTO THE OPEN DOORWAY.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Wait!

As Matthew disappears inside, Archer is about to give chase but stops when DISTANT THUNDER booms. He looks up to see...

FLOATING some 30 feet in the SKY above his ‘house’ is a GIGANTIC, YACHT-SIZED, AR-15 ASSAULT RIFLE.

Archer stares dumbly at it, mesmerized. It floats there, towering above the trees. A moment later numbers appear in RED GLOWING FIRE on its stock: 2-1-7.

Archer swallows, collects himself and continues after his boy.

INT. ARCHER'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

LIVING ROOM: Archer enters. It's darker than it was when he left here a minute ago. He pauses to listen...

Feet ascending the staircase.

ARCHER
Matthew!

He darts to the the steps and climbs.

UPSTAIRS: Archer moves down the hall toward Matthew's room. The door is closed.

He approaches but is hit by a massive wave of dread. He pauses.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Matthew?

Nothing. Archer places a trembling hand on the knob. He swallows and pushes it open.

BEDROOM: From the doorway he can see MATTHEW IN BED, wrapped in sheets, with his BACK TO THE DOOR.

Archer paces cautiously across the room. He places a timid hand on Matthew's shoulder, pulls him to reveal...

MATTHEW'S 10 year old face staring at him, blank.

Emotion floods Archer and he kneels.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Matthew!

Matthew only looks at him.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Where are you?

No response.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Please. Where did you go?

No response.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Come on talk to me. Where did you--

We CUT from Archer's pleading face to Matthew in bed but this time it's NOT MATTHEW under the sheets...

It’s the WOMAN from Justine’s vision. Her teeth are yellowed and long and her garish makeup almost pushes her into clown territory, but her expression is pure wicked glee. It says I FOOLED YOU.

Archer recoils and ...

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

... WAKES in the very position the woman was in a moment ago.

He flails, tosses off the sheets and scrambles back against the wall, clutching himself.

Sun comes through the windows. The PHOTO on the desk shows the ENTIRE TEAM smiling into the camera.

EXT. HOUSE - MORNING

Archer exits the house, ready for work.

Something dawns on him. He pauses at the door, drops his duffel bag and walks slowly across the yard tracing Matthew’s trajectory. His eyes are fixed on something in the distance.

What’s he looking at?

We pan around him, landing over his shoulder and see...

A RADIO TOWER rising above the tree line.

Matthew ran toward that tower.

EXT. TOWER - MOMENTS LATER

Archer pulls into the small parking lot at the base of the tower. He steps from the truck and stares up at it.

He scans the lot for anything out of place.

He extends one arm through the trees toward his house, then raises the other in the opposite direction. He focuses his gaze that way, across a busy commercial street. Just shops and woods behind them.

ARCHER
Where were you going?

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Archer spreads a MAP on his kitchen table and slides his finger across it until he finds HIS HOME.

ARCHER
Here.

He circles HIS HOUSE with a felt tip pen. Then he slides his finger to the TOWER just four blocks away and circles that. He produces a RULER and carefully aligns it with his house and the tower.

He INKS A LINE from his HOUSE to the TOWER and then EXTENDS IT through the commercial district, through neighborhoods and all the way to the edge of the map.

He steps back and looks at the line which crosses almost half the town. He stares at the potential trajectory of his son looking for anything significant. Nothing stands out.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Come on.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - DAY

Archer parks in front of a nondescript house. He steps out and jogs to the front door and rings the bell.

Eventually a middle aged woman, ERICA, opens the door.

ERICA
Hello?

ARCHER
Hi how are you ma'am. I'm Archer Graff. I'm Matthew's--

ERICA
I know who you are. Hi.

ARCHER
OK, good. Yeah I know we haven't spoken before directly. We've been at a lot of the same--

ERICA
How are you Archer?

He nods joylessly.

ARCHER
Real good, real good. Well. You know. All things considered. Soldiering on.

She nods. Clearly she's hurting too.

ERICA
We have to, don't we?

ARCHER
We do. Listen, I'm so sorry to surprise you at home like this in the middle of the day but I have an odd request.
(beat)
You may or may not know that we got some footage of Matthew leaving the house on our ring cam thing here.

He points at her ring camera.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
And I know you folks had the uh... same situation with Bailey.

ERICA
That's right.

ARCHER
I don't mean to be insensitive and I'm sure you already showed yours to the police just like I did but I was wondering if you'd mind letting *me* take a look at it.

She just stares.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
I don't need a copy or anything I just wanted to see if--

ERICA
I'm not comfortable with that.

He nods. Tries to think of an angle but lets it go.

ARCHER
I understand. Sorry to have bothered you.

LATER: He sits in his truck watching a Prius pull into the drive. As the driver emerges Archer hops out and jogs over.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Gary?

The man turns, startled.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Archer Graff. How are you?

GARY
Fine?

ARCHER
Matthew’s dad.

GARY
(softening)
Of course. Yeah. How you doing?

ARCHER
Listen, I got a strange question I need to ask you.

INT. GARY AND ERICA’S HOME - LATER

Archer stands over Gary’s shoulder, in his home office. The men stare at GARY’S DESKTOP. Erica watches from the doorway, arms folded in disapproval.

ON SCREEN: video of a YOUNG GIRL running across the yard in the SAME ODD POSTURE. Gary grimaces.

GARY
It’s hard to watch this.

ARCHER
There. Could you go back to when she steps on the sidewalk there?

Gary rewinds and plays the video again.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
There!

Gary pauses it as her foot is on the sidewalk.

GARY
What do you see?

Archer points at the sidewalk panel that her foot touches. He counts the panels between that one and the driveway.

ARCHER
One... two... three... four...

EXT. GARY AND ERICA'S HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Archer paces down the cement path.

ARCHER
... five... six... seven.

He kneels and sticks a LITTLE SURVEYING STAKE in the lawn where the girl stepped. Gary watches from the doorway.

Archer, almost giddy, trots across the lawn toward Gary.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Scuse me.

Gary steps aside as Archer kneels in the doorway and produces a LITTLE LASER POINTER. He squats and aims it at the stake. Then he lifts it and the dot slides across the street through a gap in the houses and landing on the back of another house some two hundred yards away.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Archer leans over his map again. He makes two new little circles and then lays down the ruler, tracing a new line across the map.

He DRAWS a LARGE CIRCLE over the neighborhood where the two lines meet. It contains some four residential blocks.

ARCHER
OK. Come on, what am I looking at?

INT. PICKUP - LATER

Archer cruises the neighborhood with the map on the seat beside him. House after house slides by.

He doesn’t know what he’s looking for, he’s just soaking in every detail he can.

Up ahead he sees Justine’s WITCH car pulling into a gas station and his jaw tightens.

EXT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Archer whips a U turn at the intersection and pulls in. He steps out and approaches.

We clock that her HAIR is MISSING A JAGGED CHUNK.

ARCHER
I want to talk to you.

She takes a deep breath.

JUSTINE
Mr. Graff I'm sorry I don't think we have anything to say to each other.

ARCHER
I think you got a lot to say.

Justine hardens.

JUSTINE
Well, I'm really fucking sorry that you feel that way. You and every other person in this city. Believe me the message is loud and clear! I'm the problem! Got it!

Archer takes an aggressive step forwards.

ARCHER
That might be the first honest thing I've heard you say. You *are* the problem.

JUSTINE
You wanna get in my face? You wanna threaten me?

ARCHER
No one's threatening you.

JUSTINE
Oh! Shows what you know! You haven't been...

Something behind Archer catches Justine's eye. He turns to see what she's looking at.

SPRINTING STRAIGHT AT THEM from across the street is PRINCIPAL ANDREW, COVERED IN BLOOD and what looks like BLACK BILE. His arms are extended, eyes bulging, teeth bared.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Andrew?

He bounds up the sidewalk, across the lot and before she can even process what is happening, he's TACKLING HER TO THE GROUND. The HOSE yanks loose SPRAYING GASOLINE everywhere.

Archer watches in a moment of dumb confusion as Andrew BITES and CLAWS at her like an animal.

ARCHER
Hey!

Archer grabs him and yanks him backward, but Andrew is relentless, pulling hard, clawing at her.

Justine flips on her stomach and scrambles away, CRAWLING UNDER THE CAR.

Archer grips tighter but Andrew rocks his head back hard into Archers face and he falls backward into the stream of gasoline.

Andrew dives under the car, crawling after her.

Archer picks himself back up, temporarily blinded by the fumes and the blood in his eyes but he doesn't hesitate. He rounds the front of the car and reaches the other side just as Andrew emerges from underneath.

Archer PUNTS HIM hard in the ribs knocking him over on his side but he's immediately picking himself up again.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Stop!

Andrew rises, snarls at Archer and charges.

BOOM!

He lands on his back. Andrew's on him, choking him out. Eyes bulging, saliva pouring out onto his face in slimy ropes.

ANDREW
AAAAAAAUUUUUGGGHHHH!!

As Archer loses consciousness we...

CUT TO BLACK.

PAUL

INT. POLICE STATION LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Officer PAUL pins his phone to his ear with his shoulder as he fastens his utility belt.

PAUL
Hotel's OK tho?

DONNA (O.S.)
It’s fine. Not the Ritz but I’m not expecting them to go nuts.

PAUL
Well it’s only six nights.

DONNA (O.S.)
Three actually. Apparently I don’t have to be here for the big wrap up shindig so I get to leave on Thursday. Isn’t that great?

PAUL
That’s great. Yeah.

DONNA (O.S.)
Cause I’m supposed to ovulate Friday so we can hit the target this month.

PAUL
Nice. OK. Yeah, good.

DONNA (O.S.)
I thought you’d like that. Oh! Will you tell my dad when you see him today that since I’ll be back for the weekend we can make their anniversary lunch thing?

PAUL
Yeah, I’ll let him know.

DONNA (O.S.)
He’ll be happy. You about to start your shift?

PAUL
Yep.

DONNA (O.S.)
You gonna hit a meeting afterward?

PAUL
Uhh... Wasn’t planning on it.

Beat.

DONNA (O.S.)
Don’t you think you should?

PAUL
If I have time I’ll hit one.

DONNA (O.S.)
Paul. Especially when you're going to be spending stretches alone I think it's important that you go to regular meetings.

PAUL
I'm not gonna drink Donna. I'm fine. If I feel not fine I'll hit a meeting.

DONNA (O.S.)
OK sweetie.

PAUL
I gotta get going.

DONNA (O.S.)
OK don't forget to tell my dad about this weekend. Love you.

PAUL
Love you.

He hangs up and holsters his gun.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Jesus.

INT. STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Paul pokes his head into ED's office.

PAUL
Hey Ed.

ED
Hey buddy.

PAUL
Donna's gonna be back Friday so we're good to do lunch with you guys on Sunday.

CAPTAIN
She's coming back early?

PAUL
Yeah I think they're cutting her loose so she wanted me to let you know that we are in.

CAPTAIN
Sounds good buddy.

PAUL
I’m starting my shift here so...

CAPTAIN
Roger that.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Paul moves through the lot of squad cars when something catches his eye.

Near the front of the lot JUSTINE is standing beside her car with another officer.

She clocks him and they share a loaded moment. Paul half waves and she gives the slightest nod of acknowledgement.

Paul watches her for a beat and then gets in his cruiser.

INT. SQUAD CAR - DAY

PAUL cruises the streets, on patrol. A top 40 song plays quietly from the radio.

LATER: A new song on the radio and Paul idles at a red light in an empty industrial district. A block ahead, a figure jogs across the street and disappears down an alley. He perks up.

He cuts the music and slides through the red light.

He eases to a stop at the mouth of the alley.

Standing on a dumpster, holding a crowbar stands ANTHONY in the process of JIMMYING OPEN A SMALL WINDOW.

Paul grabs his PA mic.

PAUL
(over loudspeaker)
Stop right there!

Anthony startles, leaps off the dumpster and runs toward the far end of the alley.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Shit.

With the dumpster where it is, he won’t be able to get the car through the alley. Paul steps on the gas.

He speeds to the end of his block and turns left. He floors it down the short block and turns left again.

Up ahead, Anthony comes into view, sprinting down the sidewalk.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Stop!

In no time he’s caught up with him. Paul yanks the car up on the sidewalk in front of Anthony who leaps onto his hood and scampers across.

Like a pro, Paul throws it into park and is out the door as Anthony touches down on the pavement.

A moment later Paul is sprinting after him.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Stop or you’re gonna get the taser!

ANTHONY doesn’t stop. Paul digs deep and in a few more yards he’s within reach. Paul leaps and tackles him to the ground.

ANTHONY
Ohhh... Please! I didn’t do nothing!

PAUL
Shut the... shut up.

Paul plants a knee on his back pinning him face down into the sidewalk. He takes a beat to catch his breath.

ANTHONY
I didn’t do nothing!

PAUL
Come on man. I saw you. Don’t even start.

ANTHONY
I didn’t do nothing!

Paul wipes his face and looks around. Empty block. His breathing settles.

PAUL
Gimme your hands.

He unhooks his cuffs and binds Anthony’s hands.

PAUL (CONT'D)
You Ok?

ANTHONY
No! I didn’t do nothing!

Paul leans to check his face.

PAUL
We went down pretty hard there. You good?

ANTHONY
Fuck you.

PAUL
You seem OK. You got any weapons on you?

ANTHONY
No.

PAUL
Nothing? How bout drugs? You holding?

ANTHONY
No.

PAUL
I’m gonna search you so you may as well just tell me now.

ANTHONY
I don’t got shit.

PAUL
Cuffs too tight? Hands OK?

ANTHONY
They cool.

Paul stands and lifts Anthony by his armpits.

PAUL
Let’s walk back to the car.

Paul Leads Anthony to the front of the cruiser.

PAUL (CONT'D)
What’s your name, sir?

ANTHONY
Anthony.

PAUL
Anthony? OK stand right here for me Anthony. Now anything in your pockets gonna stick me when I put my hands in there?

ANTHONY
No.

Paul puts on latex gloves.

PAUL
Sure? I don't wanna get poked by anything.

ANTHONY
I don't got shit man.

PAUL
OK, hold still for me.

Paul slides a hand into Anthony's front pocket and --

PAUL (CONT'D)
Fuck!

He yanks his hand back and something small and glass falls to the ground.

By Anthony's filthy shoe is a DIRTY HYPODERMIC NEEDLE.

Paul processes what just happened. He looks at the NEEDLE. He looks at the PUNCTURE WOUND in his hand where a his glove is torn and already a bead of BLOOD blooms on his finger. His jaw tightens.

BOOM! Paul swings a RIGHT CROSS straight into the side of Anthony's head, sending the handcuffed man bouncing off the the car and onto the ground in a heap.

Paul grips his hand and squeezes the blood out his finger.

PAUL (CONT'D)
FUCK!

He steps around the cruiser, slides into the driver's seat.

CRUISER: He digs through the glove box and produces a small FIRST AID POUCH. Inside he grabs a bottle of SANITIZER and pours it onto the PUNCTURE WOUND.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Come on. Come on. Please.

He rubs it in frantically and looks at his hand. The bleeding has already stopped.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Please be OK.

An awful thought dawns on him: *THE DASH-CAM.*

It's aimed through the windshield right at the empty space where moments ago he and Anthony were just standing.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Shit.

He leans forward and looks for the power button. He doesn't see one so he just PULLS THE CORD out.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Shit.

STREET: Paul steps out and moves around the the car. On the other side Anthony lays in a heap.

Paul leans over him.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Get up. Up.

Paul pulls him into a sitting position and leans him against the car. Anthony winces and turns his head away.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Can you hear me? Anthony, you with me?

Anthony glares at him. His face bloody and already swelling.

ANTHONY
Yo, you fucking hit me man...

PAUL
I'm gonna take these cuffs off you in a second and then I'm gonna get in my car and drive away. But... are you listening to me?

Anthony scowls.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I don't want to see you again. I mean *anywhere* around here. OK? The way I see it I did you wrong and you did me wrong. So let's just... Call it a day.
(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)
But if I see you out here again it's gonna be a different story. Yes? I mean it. Don't let me catch you out here again.

Paul studies him.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Consider yourself warned.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

BULLPEN: Paul moves through the office and finds CAPTAIN ED talking with another officer. He finds his eye-line and shoots him a serious look.

ED
Tony would you... Can I have a minute?

He steps to Paul.

ED (CONT'D)
What is it?

INTERROGATION ROOM: We watch through the glass as Paul finishes giving Ed the details of what happened.

INSIDE: Ed chews on what he just heard.

ED (CONT'D)
OK listen. As long as this isn't reported, that footage is going to sit on a drive somewhere and in about a month it's gonna get recorded over - *AS LONG AS* no one files a complaint or gives anyone a reason to review it. Now I'm not going to... *officially* advise you one way or another but if you're fairly certain no one saw anything, as long as this citizen doesn't show up here in the next month and file a complaint... this could all go away.

PAUL
OK that would be... Yeah.

ED
But if they do? Paul you're going to be in serious hot water.

Paul nods gravely.

ED (CONT'D)
You get that hand checked out?

INT. DOCTORS OFFICE - LATER

A doctor examines his finger.

DOCTOR
A *trash bag?*

PAUL
Yep. Picked it up to get it off the street and... Bang.

DOCTOR
OK, well, we can clean it. We can take some blood and we can test it for Hepatitis, Tetanus, HIV and the whole gambit. Beyond that there's nothing to do really but keep our fingers crossed that it comes back negative. Odds are you're fine. Single needle. Light penetration. Very possible that even if it was contaminated it didn't transfer.

PAUL
Jesus Christ I hope so.

DOCTOR
Don't go grabbing any more strange trash bags.

INT. CAR - LATER

Paul slides into his cruiser and stares out at the parking lot in front of him. He looks at his bandaged hand.

PAUL
Fuck!

Ding. His phone pings. He digs it out and looks at a text.

JUSTINE: HEY

He stares at it.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Dressed in civilian clothes, Paul enters the dimly lit bar and sees Justine posted up at the end of the room. She smiles at him as he approaches.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

They fuck.

EXT. BAR PARKING LOT - MORNING

Justine pulls out of the lot, leaving Paul standing by his car. He fishes his keys out.

CAR: Paul slides in and starts the engine. He feels horrible.

INT. DODGE - LATER

Drives his way back home feeling like complete shit.

EXT. HOME - LATER

Pulls up to his house and parks in the driveway.

INT. HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Paul lets himself in and moves through the foyer.

DONNA (O.S.)
Hello?

He freezes. *What the fuck??*

DONNA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Paul?

PAUL
Hey.

She trots down the steps, concerned.

DONNA
Where have you been?

PAUL
You're home?

DONNA
I'm home. Someone got sick and they sent everyone -- where have you *been?*

PAUL
I was... I was out.

She looks him over and her demeanor shifts to deadly serious.

DONNA
Where?

He can't think of a good answer.

DONNA (CONT'D)
Paul.

He stares, mind racing for an acceptable lie. He can't find one fast enough. She reads him like a book and hardens.

DONNA (CONT'D)
You piece of shit.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

LOCKER ROOM: Paul, dripping with depression, fastens his belt, holsters his firearm and shuts his locker.

BULLPEN: He moves through the hall. Ed's door is closed but Paul lingers, peeking through the window as he passes.

Ed's in there speaking with a suited man and for a brief moment they lock eyes - Ed gives him an unmistakably ICY GLARE. Paul averts his gaze and keeps moving.

PAUL
Shit.

EXT. POLICE STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Paul exits the station and moves down the steps when something catches his eye...

Halfway down the block ANTHONY is shuffling toward the station. His face is considerably more swollen than last we saw him.

PAUL
Son of a bitch.

Anthony sees Paul and stops. They stare at each other.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Son of a bitch!

Anthony turns and sprints around the corner. Paul rushes to his squad car and hops in.

INT. SQUAD CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Paul pulls out of the station at speed. He reaches down and flips off the lock of the mounted shotgun beside him.

Then he reaches up and yanks out the little cord connected to the dash cam.

CUT TO BLACK.

ANTHONY

EXT. CITY PARK - DAWN

In the pale light of morning, rain drizzles onto ANTHONY in his tent. Currently his face sports none of the wounds Paul gave him so we can tell we're earlier in time.

At the moment he's unharmed and smoking crack. Or trying to.

ANTHONY
Come on.

He sparks his lighter and holds the flame to his little glass pipe. He sucks at it but it produces no smoke.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Come on!

He tries again but gets nothing. He taps the little pipe into his hand, emptying its contents.

With blackened fingers he digs in his little plastic tin, rummaging through DIRTY NEEDLES and CHARRED SPOONS, finally finding a piece of wire.

He scrapes the pipe with the wire and then stuffs the little charred bits back in.

He sparks it up. Nothing.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Fuck!

EXT. STREET - LATER

Anthony speed-walks down the block pulling at every car door handle he passes, testing if they're locked.

One opens and he immediately hops in.

LATER: Anthony speed-walks down a rainy street untangling wires of little speakers.

INT. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Anthony is let into a filthy apartment by a large BANGER. Another two sit on the couch smoking weed and watching TV.

BANGER
Watchu after?

ANTHONY
Shabu. Just one.

BANGER
Twenty.

ANTHONY
I have this.

Anthony holds the speakers out.

BANGER
Fuck outta here.

ANTHONY
This'll bring thirty, no problem.

The banger starts pushing him toward the door.

BANGER
You know you don't come through here without cash, B.

ANTHONY
The pawn shop ain't open yet! I'll pay you thirty for a twenty bag! I'm saying--

BANGER
Yo, move B.

ANTHONY
You'll make more money!

The banger punches him in the face hard. Anthony staggers back into the door and drops the speakers.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
OK!

He squats to snatch them back up.

BANGER
Move, dog!

ANTHONY
OK!

EXT. PAWN SHOP - LATER

Anthony waits impatiently outside of a pawnbrokers. An employee appears and flips the closed sign to open.

INT. PAWN SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Anthony bounces in place at the counter, his skin on fire as the broker looks over the speakers.

He eyes a POSTER behind the man with a grid of photos showing the missing children with the the words '$50,000 REWARD'

PAWNBROKER
No.

ANTHONY
No? What do you mean *no?* What's *no?*

PAWNBROKER
I no want.

ANTHONY
Yo! These are state of the art! These are good! These are worth thirty bucks!

PAWNBROKER
No.

ANTHONY
Twenty! Please!

The broker shakes his head.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Please man. Please!

Nothing.

EXT. STREETS - LATER

Rain pours down on Anthony as he jogs across the street toward an alley behind an industrial warehouse.

He scampers up onto a dumpster, stands precariously and tries to jimmy a window open.

BWOOOOP!

PAUL
Stop right there!

He startles, nearly falling. At the mouth of the alley sits an idling police car.

ANTHONY
Fuck!

Anthony hops off the dumpster and sprints down the alley.

He rounds the corner and hauls ass down the block but the car is already appearing behind him. It roars after him and in no time is up on the sidewalk, heading him off.

Anthony leaps up and over the hood and in the next moment PAUL is chasing after him on foot.

In a few short steps he’s on him.

BLACK.

-- Anthony comes to, handcuffed and leaned against the cruiser. His head is bleeding bad. Paul squats over him.

PAUL
You with me?

ANTHONY
Yo, you fucking hit me man...

Anthony scowls through the blood.

PAUL
I’m gonna take these cuffs off you in a second and then I’m gonna get in my car and drive away. But... are you listening to me?

Anthony scowls.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I don’t want to see you again. I mean *anywhere* around here. OK? The way I see it I did you wrong and you did me wrong. So let’s just... Call it a day. But if I see you out here again it’s gonna be a different story. Yes? I mean it. Don’t let me catch you out here again.

Paul studies him.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Consider yourself warned.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Anthony limps down a rainy suburban street. Blood stains his face and his legs are covered in mud but he’s still on a mission. Something catches his eye and he stops.

The camera swings to reveal...

ALEX’S HOUSE.

He eyes the DIRTY CAR and the OVERGROWN LAWN. He steps to the MAILBOX by the sidewalk and flips down the little hatch. It’s STUFFED with WEEKS OF MAIL.

Jackpot.

EXT. ALEX'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

He shuffles around the side, scanning for an access point clocking the PAPERED OVER WINDOWS.

In the back yard he steps onto the rear porch and tries the door but it’s locked. He steps back and studies the house.

-- He’s SCALING A STORM DRAIN with surprising skill and in no time he’s planted a foot on an outcropping near a window. A little effort and he manages to slide the window open.

INT. ALEX’S HOME - CONTINUOUS

UPSTAIRS: Dark and musty in here. Anthony worms his head through the window. For a beat he’s still, letting his eyes adjust to the dark.

He’s above a landing with a closed door at either side. A staircase in front of him leads down.

He hears nothing so he drops quietly to the floor.

He moves left and pushes the door open to reveal...

ALEX’S ROOM: Messy twin bed, toys on the dresser, posters. Nothing valuable.

He steps to the bed and pulls the PILLOW CASE off a pillow.

LANDING: Anthony moves to the door opposite. He tries the knob. It’s LOCKED. He gives it a hard shake but it won’t give.

He steps back and considers kicking it in. *Fuck it. I’ll try it later.*

He moves to the stairs and makes his way down.

LIVING ROOM: Anthony creeps through the clutter. He’s so fixated on what he can steal that he doesn’t notice the MAN and WOMAN sitting on the couch until he’s almost on top of them.

ANTHONY
Fuck!

He stumbles back and KNOCKS A LAMP OVER with a CRASH. The couple on the sofa don’t move. They sit bolt upright, eyes open wide but focused on nothing.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Yo. I’m sorry. I didn’t...

They don’t react.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Hello?

Nothing. He takes a step closer and leans down.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Hello?

He waves a hand in front of their eyes.

They look like they haven’t showered or changed in weeks. Their clothes are dirty and their eyes are yellow and dull. Greasy skin. But breathing. Definitely breathing.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Yo are you OK?

They don't respond and he stands again. Satisfied that they pose no threat, he scans the room.

He spots a game console and moves to it, unplugging the cables.

THUMP.

A sound from upstairs.

He creeps to the base of the stairs, craning to see up into the dark. *Is it coming from the locked room?*

He eyes the couple on the couch. They haven't stirred.

KITCHEN: He dumps a drawer of silver utensils into the pillow case, checking the doorway nervously as he operates.

FOYER: Anthony stops in front of a closed door.

He opens it.

It leads to the BASEMENT. He steps in and we rack to the couple on the couch. *Still no movement.*

BASEMENT: Anthony flips on the light but it only illuminates the landing. He takes a few cautious steps down, squats and peers into the dark of the room below.

And then he sees it...

STANDING in the near total dark of the basement are...

17 perfectly still 10 YEAR OLD CHILDREN.

They stand in a loose group occupying most of the room, all facing away from him.

Anthony's blood freezes. He gasps and stumbles back.

In unison every child TURNS and STARES AT HIM.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Oh fuck...

He bolts up the steps.

GROUND FLOOR: Anthony darts out of the basement and slams the door shut behind him.

In the background we see the TWO ADULTS ON THE COUCH silently RISE TO THEIR FEET.

Anthony hasn't noticed. He's preoccupied, dragging a small table in front of the basement door.

They're crossing the room towards him when he finally sees.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
FUCK!!!

He stumbles backwards toward the front door of the house.

In a full blown panic Anthony pulls at the knob and then fumbles and paws at the deadbolts.

The dark figures close in.

But he manages to get the door open and sunlight floods into the foyer.

He's out.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Anthony tears from the house, tripping and eating shit in the yard. But he's soon back on his feet and sprinting down the street.

INT. PAWN SHOP - LATER

The pawnbroker has finished examining the stolen silver and wraps them in a cloth. A filthy Anthony vibrates with anticipation as the broker counts out some cash.

PAWNBROKER
Twenty, forty, sixty, eighty, one hundred.

Once again his eyes drift to the poster and this time the pieces fall into place.

$50,000?

CLERK
Hey! Here.

He looks down, sees the cash and snatches it up.

EXT. PROJECTS - DAY

Anthony squats against a wall with a FULL PIPE at long last. He sucks the fumes down and holds it in his lungs.

Sweet relief. *Absolutely worth it.*

EXT. STREET - LATER

Anthony talks into a payphone.

ANTHONY
Yeah I'm calling about the fifty thousand dollar reward for information about the missing kids?
(beat)
Yeah I know where they are.
(beat)
I mean... I'm pretty sure all of them. It looked like a bunch of em. They're all standing in the basement of this house. Just like standing there.
(beat)
I don't know the address but it's--
(beat)
No I'm saying all the kids are just in the basement and standing all still and shit and it's all fucked up over there. There's like two wackos in there and--
(beat)
Yeah. So how does this work? How do I get the money?
(beat)
No I'm not... I'm completely serious. I can show you if you don't believe me.
(beat)
Well... do I *have* to come in? Can someone meet me somewhere with the cash?
(beat)
Cause I really don't want to come in, OK? I don't like police stations.

EXT. POLICE STATION - LATER

Anthony shambles down the block toward the police station. He crosses the street when...

PAUL (O.S.)
Hey!

Paul is striding down the steps of the station house.

PAUL (CONT'D)
What did I tell you? Huh? What did I say?

Anthony turns and runs.

EXT. STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

Anthony sprints through the streets.

-- He cuts down an alley.

-- He leaps over a railing and tumbles down an embankment into a wooded city park.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Anthony trudges through the woods, confident he's lost Paul.

ANTHONY
(mocking Paul)
What did I tell you? *Huh? Huh?*

PING

Anthony stops. *What the fuck was that sound?*

It sounded like a SINGLE HIGH PITCHED PIANO KEY. *Out here in the middle of the woods?*

Anthony's hackles go up. He scans the forest.

Slow pan of the dark canopy revealing nothing but stretches of dark green until we catch some 100 yards away - a SPLASH of COLOR on the ground...

It's hard to see detail from this distance but THE WOMAN FROM ARCHER'S DREAM appears to be sprouting out of the dirt WAIST UP - as if her lower half were buried. She has a happy look on her face and her BRIGHT OUTFIT and MAKEUP pop against the dark of the forest.

Something about the sight of this brightly colored woman half buried in the depths of the woods unsettles him. She raises one arm and WAVES BIG. Even from this distance we can feel her smile.

Panic kicks in and he flees.

INT. TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Anthony scurries into his little camp and dives into his TENT.

He scuttles back from the flap and holds himself.

ANTHONY
You're OK. That wasn't real. That wasn't real. You're OK.

And then...

The snapping of twigs. SLOW FOOTSTEPS.

His eyes widen. *Did I really hear that?*

MORE FOOTSTEPS. Closer now.

He pops open his little drug tin and snatches up 3 HYPODERMIC NEEDLES, gripping them in his fist like a knife.

He stares at the flap, eyes wide.

Footsteps getting unmistakably closer.

A SHADOW creeps across the tent. Anthony's heart blasts in his ears. Someone is squatting on the other side of the fabric. He RAISES the NEEDLES, clenches his teeth and...

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
AAAAAUUUGHGH!!!

Anthony LUNGES through the flap SWINGING the NEEDLES into...

...PAUL'S FACE!

PAUL
AAAAUUGHGH!!!

Paul recoils, scrambling back on his ass.

Anthony scurries the opposite direction but gets tangled up in the tent which collapses around him.

Paul yanks a syringe from his cheek, and gawks at it.

PAUL (CONT'D)
AUUUUGHGH! FUCKER!

He's up in a flash, grabbing Anthony by the ankles and pulling him from the mess of nylon.

PAUL (CONT'D)
You stabbed me! You fucking...

Paul pulls his GUN from its HOLSTER.

ANTHONY
Wait!

Paul shoves the gun into Anthony's face, ready to fire.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
I know where the kids are!

Paul hesitates.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
That's why I was coming to the station! I swear to God!

PAUL
You're fucking lying!

ANTHONY
I promise you! I know where they are!

Paul gathers himself.

PAUL
Where?

ANTHONY
At a house. Not far. In the basement.

PAUL
What the fuck are you... *What house?*

ANTHONY
I can show you man!

INT. SQUAD CAR - DAY

Paul shoves a handcuffed Anthony into the backseat and slams the door. He gets in the driver's seat and checks himself in the vanity, wincing at the bloody holes in his face.

PAUL
Fuck me.

He turns to Anthony.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Do you have AIDS?

ANTHONY
Huh?

PAUL
AIDS asshole. You have AIDS?

ANTHONY
I don’t think so.

PAUL
Hepatitis? Shit like that?

ANTHONY
Shit... Not that I know of.

Paul grimaces and starts the engine.

EXT. ALEX’S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

The patrol car rolls down the street toward Alex’s house.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Anthony leans toward the bulletproof divider.

ANTHONY
That one. The dark one at the end of the block. Right there.

Paul parks in front of the house and looks it over.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
I’m telling you man. It’s ... weird in there.

Paul snorts and opens his door.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Yo I’m not going back in there man!

PAUL
You’re not going anywhere.

ANTHONY
So hold up. How do I know you aren’t going to try and gank that reward for yourself? Huh?

Paul glares at him and steps out. Anthony watches as he slams the door and walks toward the house.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Stupid fucking asshole pig.

Paul reaches the front door and knocks.

A beat later, the front door opens.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
What the fuck...

Paul is chatting with someone but Anthony can’t see who.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Yo...

Paul steps inside and the door closes.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Yo! *What the fuck?*

HOURS LATER: The sun has set and the squad car hasn’t moved. Anthony sits as before, still cuffed.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Yo!

He kicks at the bulletproof divider.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Let me the fuck out! What the fuck?

The front door of the house OPENS. He perks up.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Thank you!

Paul emerges and walks toward the car, but he’s not the same. His ARMS ARE OUT AT HIS SIDES in the signature angle.

Anthony senses something is very wrong. He recoils from the door.

Paul reaches the door and fumbles it open. He leans down and we see his FACE IS RED AND TWISTED. His EYES BULGE. His MOUTH DROOLS. He looks possessed.

He grabs at Anthony.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Yo! What the--

Anthony kicks at him but Paul seizes his legs and YANKS HIM FROM THE VEHICLE.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - CONTINUOUS

Paul DRAGS a writhing Anthony across the grass toward the open door of the house.

ANTHONY
Help! Help me!

CUT TO BLACK

ANDREW

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Andrew holds his phone to his ear as he pushes a shopping cart. His wife Ginny drops in products as they go.

ANDREW
Justine, I have been abundantly clear. I have been explicit. I do not want you interacting with Alex. I'm struggling to understand how you're even bringing this to me.

JUSTINE
I'm sorry Andrew but I consider the welfare of a child more important than your marching orders. That's just--

She holds up two bags of cookies. He nods at the Oreos.

ANDREW
Justine stop. Here's the bottom line. Alex has been bothered enough by the events of the last two months as I'm sure you have--

JUSTINE
Andrew--

ANDREW
--which is why I'm going to do you the courtesy of forgetting that this phone call ever took place.

JUSTINE
If a child's welfare is questioned by law you have to refer it to CPS. *By law.*

ANDREW
Are you really going to take it there? Is this the corner you're going to put me in?

His wife holds up two chips. He nods at the Fritos.

JUSTINE
Just go make a house call, Andrew. Just do *that*.

ANDREW
I'm not authorized to 'just make house calls'.

JUSTINE
Well, you're a mandatory reporter! You have to--

ANDREW
Here's what I'll do. I'll invite his parents to come in and have a talk with me. I'll have a face to face at the school. Is that acceptable to you?

His wife holds up two salad dressings, he motions to one and she considers them and drops the other in the cart.

JUSTINE
I would really appreciate that.

ANDREW
OK then you're welcome. Goodbye.

He hangs up.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
(to wife)
I said I wanted the cool ranch.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Andrew works at his desk. He looks up and watches through the frosted glass that lines his office to see the blurry shape of his secretary, MARGE moving toward his door.

Knock knock.

ANDREW
Yes?

She pokes her head in.

MARGE
Your 2 o’clock is here.

ANDREW
That’s fine.

She doesn’t move.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Yes?

Something in her expression reads: *Prepare yourself.*

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Well, send them in please Marge.

Marge nods solemnly and turns back toward the hall.

MARGE
This way, ma’am.

Andrew watches as a new shape passes along the frosted glass. This one is BRIGHT AS A PEACOCK with loud blues and reds from head to toe.

Marge steps back to give her a wide birth as GLADYS steps through the door.

She looks... striking. Clad in a BRIGHT NEON JUMPER with a clashing top and bottom, caked in COLORFUL MAKEUP, RED HAIR frizzing out in all directions and GAUDY JEWELRY everywhere.

GLADYS
Principal Andrew?

ANDREW
Yes, hi. Come on in.

He crosses and shakes her hand, taking in her outfit.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Have a seat, please.
(to secretary)
Thank you Marge.

Marge frowns and shuts the door. Andrew and Gladys sit.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Thank you so much for coming in. I... I know you folks have had a lot of attention lately and not all of it could possibly be wanted.

GLADYS
I’m happy to come by. It’s fine.

Andrew studies her. Taking in the lipstick and eyeliner. The bracelets and tennis shoes. She smiles at him expectantly.

ANDREW
OK forgive me... We have *not* met is that right?

GLADYS
I don’t believe so.

ANDREW
OK. Phew because I was relatively certain I’d remember. I know I’ve met Alex’s father before but--

GLADYS
I’m Alex’s Aunt. His mother is my sister.

ANDREW
I see. I see. OK. That’s where my confusion is. You’re his *Aunt*.

GLADYS
Yes.

ANDREW
OK so you are not his legal guardian?

GLADYS
No that would be his parents of course.

ANDREW
OK well forgive me Gladys, but unfortunately I need to speak with his parents.

GLADYS
Well I’m sorry to say it, but his parents are feeling unwell as of late and I’ve been staying with them to help take care of Alex.

ANDREW
Sounds serious.

GLADYS
Oh not serious no. Nothing terminal. Just a touch of consumption.

ANDREW
A touch of... consumption.

GLADYS
Mmm.

Beat.

ANDREW
You know what, I'm embarrassed to say it but I guess I don't really know what that means. I thought that was something settlers got on the Oregon trail. Is that... tuberculosis?

GLADYS
They're managing fine but they need to stay home until they're well.

ANDREW
So they're both not working currently?

GLADYS
She's a writer and he's a stay at home full time dad. So with my help life can move along without too much disruption I'd think.

Andrew frowns.

ANDREW
I had hoped to speak with them in person because... This is awkward but a... concerned individual has lodged a welfare complaint and unfortunately I need to make contact with the child's legal guardian. It's something that's not really negotiable. I need to speak with his parents. In person.

GLADYS
Oh dear.

ANDREW
It's just a formality but it *is* necessary. I could come to the house if that would make it easier. I'm trying to avoid involving CPS because frankly I'm not convinced anything is wrong. I don't--

GLADYS
Who made the complaint?

ANDREW
I'm not at liberty to say.

GLADYS
Well this is very troubling.

ANDREW
Believe me it's just a formality like I said. I'm doing my best to avoid involving any authority but I can't do that unless I speak with the legal guardian.

Gladys frowns.

INT. ANDREW'S HOUSE - DAY

KITCHEN: Ginny prepares a tray of elaborately arranged junk food. Hot dogs, cookies and sodas. She hums to herself as she carries it into the...

LIVING ROOM: She sets the tray on the coffee table and takes her place on the couch next to Andrew. They smile and watch some stupid shit on TV.

The doorbell rings.

GINNY
Who could that be?

Andrew frowns, rises and moves to the door. He pulls it open to reveal GLADYS standing there with a bag slung over her shoulder fanning herself.

ANDREW
Mrs. Lilly...

GLADYS
Oh thank God, you're home! I'm so sorry to bother you on a Saturday like this. Please forgive me.

ANDREW
We were just sitting down to--

GLADYS
The bus didn't pick me up when it was scheduled to and I didn't realize until it was far too late that I was standing on the wrong corner and by the time I put that together I'd missed it entirely so I had to just walk all the way across town to get here.

ANDREWS
Well, I'm very sorry to hear that but we're in the middle of--

GLADYS
Sweetie, I hate to say it but I feel on the verge of collapse. Could I trouble you for some water?

Ginny appears behind Andrew.

GINNY
Of course you can have some water.

ANDREW
I'm afraid it's really not a good--

GLADYS
Oh thank you so much!

Gladys pushes in past Andrew and squeezes Ginny's hand.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
I'm Gladys Lilly. It's so nice to meet you.

She pushes toward the kitchen. A puzzled Andrew and Ginny follow.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
I know it's inconvenient but I really needed to speak with you about our conversation yesterday.
(*gasp*)
You two have an absolutely lovely home! Oh my Gosh look at this place!

GINNY
Andrew get her a glass.

Andrew moves to a cabinet as Gladys PLOPS HER BAG on the kitchen island.

GLADYS
A bowl actually if you don't mind.

ANDREW
A... bowl?

GLADYS
Thank you sweetie. It's a peculiarity of mine. I don't even try to rationalize it any more.

They stare at her.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
But yes if you don't mind... a bowl. Please I'm very faint. It's such a long walk to get here.

ANDREW
A ... bowl of water. OK.

He rummages for a bowl as Gladys digs in her bag.

GLADYS
I wanted you to know that I spoke with Alex's father who's very ill as I said, but the good news is that he's more than happy to come in first thing Monday and sit down with you to clear everything up.

Andrew fills the bowl with water.

ANDREW
I appreciate that but it really isn't necessary for you to--

GLADYS
So there's no need to contact the authorities right?

ANDREW
That's... sure I guess not.

He places the BOWL on the counter. Gladys pulls a STICK STRUCTURE from her bag and smiles at him.

GLADYS
So I take it you haven't contacted them yet, is that right?

ANDREW
Gladys I'm afraid I'm going to have to insist that... what is that?

GLADYS
You *haven't* contacted them yet right?

ANDREW
... No I haven't. What is--

Gladys places the sticks on the counter. Then without fuss she removes a RAZOR from her bag and SLICES HER PALM OPEN.

GINNY
Oh my *God!*

GLADYS
Whoops! Look what I did! Oh my goodness.

She holds her hand over the sticks and lets her BLOOD FLOW ONTO IT. She smiles with a 'Silly me' head shake.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
(to Ginny)
Would you get me a rag dear?

ANDREW
Why on earth did you do that?

GLADYS
Well it was a mistake of course! Wow that's bleeding, isn't it?

ANDREW
Ginny go get some alcohol and the first aid kit.

GLADYS
No! Nonsense. It's nothing!

Ginny steps forward with a washcloth as Gladys reaches in her bag and snatches out a PAIR OF SCISSORS. Quick as a cat, she reaches out and SNIPS OFF a chunk of Ginny's HAIR.

GINNY
AAAAAHHH!!! What did you do?

Ginny leaps back clutching at her bangs. Andrew stares in dumb shock as Gladys WRAPS the LOCK OF HAIR tightly around the BLOODY STICK and then just as quick reaches forward and SMEARS HER BLOODY HAND ACROSS ANDREW'S FACE.

He staggers back almost falling as he goes.

ANDREW
Ginny call 911!

But Gladys has all she needs. She lifts from her bag a SMALL GOLDEN BELL and...

Ding.

Something shifts in Andrew. He slumps and drops his arms at his sides. Ginny stares in horror.

GINNY
Andrew?

Gladys sets down the bell, picks up the STICKS and SNAPS THEM IN HALF.

On cue, Andrew turns and LUNGES at Ginny.

GINNY (CONT'D)
Andrew!

He's on her, TACKLING her to the floor. He straddles her and WRAPS HIS HANDS AROUND HER THROAT.

Gladys saunters to the sink and runs her bloody hand under the faucet.

GLADYS
Tsk.

She grabs another rag and wraps her hand. She turns to watch Andrew snarling and squeezing the life from his wife.

Ginny, bug-eyed, claws at his face, unable to scream.

Andrew OPENS HIS MOUTH wide and...

ANDREW
BRRRAAAAAUUU...

BLACK BILE SPEWS like a faucet splattering into GINNY'S FACE.

Gladys has created a neat little bandage out of the dishcloth and by the time she steps around the island to survey the damage, Ginny is dead.

Gladys plucks the bloody sticks from the counter and drops them in the bowl of water. Andrew stands, relaxed and neutral - totally at ease despite the bleeding cuts on his face and the black vomit that runs down his chest.

Gladys pulls the sticks from the bowl and unties the lock of hair.

She reaches into her bag and pulls out ANOTHER LOCK OF HAIR that we recognize as JUSTINE'S. Gladys wraps Justine's hair around the sticks and once again SNAPS them.

Andrew turns and dashes for the front door. He throws it open and runs out of the house.

Gladys calmly collects her possessions and returns them to her bag. She steps over Ginny's body and exits.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Gladys strolls out into the pleasant suburban daylight toward her car parked just outside.

Before she gets in she turns to see Andrew, already about two blocks away sprinting toward the center of town.

Gladys smiles and slides into the car.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Andrew runs down the street with blood smeared across his face, and vomit splattered down his chest. His arms are out in the same unique posture we've seen before.

-- He bounds his way through a commercial district. People stop and stare at the sprinting man with blood smeared across his face. He begins to grunt with exertion.

ANDREW
Uhh...uhh...uh....

BYSTANDER
Oh my God.

He rounds a corner and cuts diagonally across the street. Cars brake just short of hitting him.

Andrew sprints through intersections/ across parking lots/ through alleys.

Eventually the GAS STATION comes into view and Andrew beelines it across the length of a city block. Justine and Archer talk, oblivious to his approach.

As he mounts the pavement she turns and sees him.

JUSTINE
Andrew?

He closes the gap and TACKLES her, knocking the HOSE from the car and GASOLINE SPLASHES out in an arc.

He’s on top of her just like he was on his wife minutes ago, clawing at her face and growling like an animal.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Ahhh!!

Archer takes a moment to process the violence before springing to action grabbing Andrew by the back of his shirt and pulling him off of her.

ARCHER
Hey! No!

But Andrew is ferocious and he lunges again, clawing at her face and biting at her hands.

Justine manages to flip onto her stomach and crawl under her car worming away from him.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Stop!

Andrew breaks free of Archer and slithers under the car after her but Justine’s already out on the other side.

She pulls herself up and launches herself toward the doors of the gas station. Andrew comes clawing out from under the car after her as Archer is rounding the front of the vehicle.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Hey!

As Andrew rises to his knees, Archer kicks him in the ribs knocking him sideways but Andrew pops right back up and tackles him to the ground.

INT. GAS STATION SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Justine staggers inside and makes for the back of the shop.

JUSTINE
Help me!

The clerk cranes to watch as Andrew bounds in after her.

Justine moves down an aisle and comes to wall of refrigerated doors that line the rear of the shop.

She turns left and sprints along the refrigerators till she comes to a bathroom door. She tries it but it's locked.

Andrew has been tracing her route and now appears at the far corner. He locks onto her and comes sprinting along the row of fridges, closing the distance, eyes bulging, teeth gnashing when --

WHAM! Archer comes full sprint down the aisle between them and BODY CHECKS Andrew hard INTO THE FREEZER GLASS, SHATTERING it and sending glass and beverages flying. Both men go down.

Andrew's picks himself up immediately. He's bleeding profusely from a cut in the side of his face but his eyes never leave Justine. He throws himself at her, chasing her toward the front of the store.

CLERK
(still behind the counter)
Get out! Out of my shop!

JUSTINE
Fucking help me!

She doesn't even wait for him to respond. She runs past the counter once more and out the doors with Andrew, bloodier than ever, close behind.

EXT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Justine sprints to her car, yanks open the passenger door and dives in, slamming it shut as Andrew collides with it.

She hits the lock as he paws at the handle.

ANDREW
Uhhhhh! GRrrrrrgghgh!!

She watches in horror as he stares at her through the glass with pure animal rage.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
GRAAAAAAAAAAH!

She wriggles into the driver's seat and starts the car.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
GRAH!!

She puts it in drive and peels out.

Archer stumbles out of the store clutching a bloody arm to his chest just in time to see JUSTINE FLOORING IT down the block and ANDREW ON FOOT chasing after her.

He bolts to his truck.

TRUCK: Archer fumbles with his keys, dropping them on the floor.

ARCHER
Fuck!

He manages to retrieve them and get them in the ignition. He throws the truck in drive and peels out after them.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

By the time he's on the road Justine's already some three blocks ahead. She's running stop signs and putting real distance between her and Andrew who is a block and a half away, running full speed down the middle of the street.

Archer clenches his jaw and steps on the gas, rapidly closing the distance between him and Andrew.

ARCHER
Alright you piece of---

BAM! A sedan flies through the intersection and SMASHES INTO ANDREW at a solid 30 mph flinging him like a rag-doll.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Holy shit!

Andrew lands in a crumpled heap near the sidewalk and Archer slows to a stop.

-- He walks across the road to Andrew's body as the DRIVER of the car that hit him comes running up, already sobbing.

DRIVER
Oh my God! I didn't see him! He ran right out in front of me!

Archer stares at Andrew's dead and broken body.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

We watch through an open door as Archer sits on an examination table while a nurse bandages his arm. A cop stands by, jotting in a notepad.

INT. HOSPITAL LOBBY - LATER

Archer moves down the hall and sees Justine at the front desk. They lock eyes.

EXT. HOSPITAL - MOMENTS LATER

They step into the parking lot and eye each other, awkwardly. She lights a cigarette.

ARCHER
You OK?

JUSTINE
I think so. Just scraped up. You?

ARCHER
Same.

Beat.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
That was... Fucking... crazy.

JUSTINE
Jesus Christ.

ARCHER
Why? Why'd he act like that? That was almost... not human.

JUSTINE
The last time I talked to him he was fine. He really was. I've never seen anything like that in my life.

Beat.

ARCHER
I have.

She stares at him.

JUSTINE
What are you talking about?

ARCHER
The way he ran. I've seen that before.
(beat)
Can I show you something?

INT. ARCHER'S TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

They sit in his truck in the hospital parking lot. Archer flips on the dome light and digs around in his work bag.

ARCHER
And their little girl ran the same way that Matthew did. Same posture. Same *exact* way. Just how Andrew ran after you today. Andrew was like a heat seeking missile locked onto you. Here, look at this.

He unfolds the map on the dash and shows her the trajectories and the circle where they intersect.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
If you assume they were heading in a straight line at some target of theirs - and you assume they both had the *same* target... those lines intersect somewhere around... *here.*

He points to the circled neighborhood. Justine leans forward.

JUSTINE
Oh my God.

ARCHER
So there must be something about this area. Something must be--

JUSTINE
Alex.

ARCHER
What?

She points at a house in the dead center of his circle.

JUSTINE
Alex Lilly lives in this house.

Beat.

ARCHER
Alex Lilly lives... in *this* house?

She stares at him and nods. They share a loaded beat as the implications of this land.

CUT TO BLACK

ALEX

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Alex sits at his desk. Pull back to reveal he's amongst his very present classmates.

JUSTINE (O.S.)
Who else can think of an example of a parasite? Anyone?

A GIRL behind him raises her hand.

JUSTINE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Lisa?

LISA
A tapeworm.

JUSTINE
A tapeworm! Very good! That's a gross one right? It lives in your intestines and eats your food doesn't it? That's a great one. Who can think of another parasite?

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - LATER

Alex moves amongst the flow of kids toward lunch. A larger boy, MATTHEW (Archer's son) rushes up from behind and BODY CHECKS him into the wall. ALEX whirls.

ALEX
Stop it!

MATTHEW
(mocking)
Stop it!

Alex fumes, turns and keeps walking. Matthew and his crew keep pace behind him.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)
Stop it! Stoooooop it!

EXT. SCHOOL - PARKING LOT

It's the end of the school day. Alex moves through the crowd of kids loading into cars and minivans. He spots his dad's SUV and makes his way over.

SUV: Alex's dad shoots him a smile as he loads in.

DAD
How you doing big guy?

ALEX
Good.

Alex throws his bag into the back as his dad pulls into the street.

DAD
How was your day?

ALEX
Good.

DAD
Good? Kiss any supermodels?

ALEX
No.

His dad smiles at him again.

DAD
Lotta homework tonight?

ALEX
I dunno. Not really.

DAD
So, listen bud, the big day is here. Your mom's aunt Gladys is coming tonight, remember?

ALEX
Why do we have to have her live at our house?

DAD
Well... It's like we talked about. She's sick. And she doesn't really have anywhere else to go.

ALEX
I don't even know her, tho.

DAD
I hear you. I don't really know her either buddy. Honestly your mom doesn't really know her that well, but family is important.
(MORE)

DAD (CONT'D)
And this is what family does. You help each other out when they need you.

INT. ALEX'S HOUSE - DAY

Alex and his Dad step into the living room and we see it's a world away from the dingy cave that we know it as. It's bright, tidy and cozy. Alex's mom fusses in the dining room.

MOM
My men have returned!

His dad crosses and gives her a smooch before moving into the kitchen. She smiles at Alex.

MOM (CONT'D)
Good day at school?

ALEX
Yeah.

MOM
Listen, I want to get this house in order before aunt Gladys shows up. Can you do me a favor and get your room cleaned up before you do your homework?

ALEX
She's not coming in my room is she?

MOM
I'd really like to have a clean house when she gets here. That includes your room.

He rolls his eyes and heads upstairs.

MOM (CONT'D)
I know it's horrible, picking up after yourself.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alex lays in bed when the splash of car headlights cross his room. He rises and moves to the window.

In the driveway his father exits the car and help a VERY FRAIL ELDERLY GLADYS (noticeably older than we saw her with Andrew) from the her seat.

Once she’s on her feet she points to the back seat and Alex’s Dad retrieves a SMALL POTTED TREE. He cradles the tree in one arm and she clings to the other.

She’s rail thin and deathly pale with sunken eyes. Every step is a delicate one.

Sounds of activity in the living room.

MOM (O.S.)
Hiiii! Come in!

DAD (O.S.)
Got the door?

MOM (O.S.)
I got it.

DAD (O.S.)
One more step. There we go.

INT. ALEX’S BEDROOM - MORNING

Alex wakes and sits up in bed. He hears sounds from the kitchen.

HALLWAY: He moves delicately past the closed door to the guest room.

KITCHEN: Alex eats as his mom types on her laptop at the dinner table.

MOM
You done?

ALEX
Mm hmm.

MOM
OK go brush your teeth and get your stuff.

He moves toward the staircase.

MOM (CONT'D)
And be quiet back there. Your aunt Gladys is resting. We don’t want to disturb her.

BATHROOM: Alex brushes his teeth.

HALLWAY: Backpack over his shoulder, Alex moves down the hall toward the stairs but lingers at the door to the guest room. He cocks his head, listening for any sound from within.

He rests his hand on the knob and turns it as slowly and silently as he can. He eases the door open with a crack.

POV: The room slowly comes into view. The first thing he sees is the CURIOUS POTTED TREE sitting on the dresser. It has thorns and LITTLE BLACK LEAVES, like he's never seen before.

He opens the door wider revealing the foot of the bed, her body under the sheets, and finally her gaunt face. She looks like she's on deaths door - hollow cheeks, thinning hair, and sunken eyes that stair at the ceiling.

Alex studies her through the crack in the door until...

She TURNS and LOCKS EYES with him.

He gasps, pulls the door shut and hurries downstairs.

INT. CAR - LATER

Alex's Dad drives him to school.

ALEX
How long is she going to stay with us?

His dad weighs this for a beat.

DAD
That's hard to say buddy. It doesn't seem like she's going to get better.

ALEX
So she's going to stay with us forever?

DAD
No... I don't think it will be more than a month.

His dad checks to see if the message is received but Alex only stares out the window.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - LATER

Alex hops out of the car.

DAD
Pick you up at 2 pal. Love you.

ALEX
OK. Love you!

Alex shuts the door and makes his way inside.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

Alex and the class take a test in silence.

JUSTINE
That’s time. Pencils down.

Matthew turns and throws his pencil into Alex’s face.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Matthew!

MATTHEW
(laughing)
You said pencils down.

JUSTINE
Matthew outside now. Alex are you OK?

Alex nods and looks at his test as if nothing happened.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Alex?

ALEX
I’m fine.

JUSTINE
Matthew let’s go. Get your bag.

MATTHEW
It was a joke! Oh my God!

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Alex looks for his dad amidst the end of day chaos. One by one the busses roll out and the minivans depart.

No dad.

-- Alex stands in the same place but the crowd has evaporated and the last two kids hop into a nearby minivan.

He’s the last one.

A passing adult lingers.

GROWNUP
You miss your ride, son?

ALEX
I’m OK.

GROWNUP
Sure?

Alex starts walking, worry on his face.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - MONTAGE

He walks along busy commercial buildings and eventually greener residential blocks until...

EXT. ALEX'S HOUSE - LATER

He arrives at his house. His dad’s car sits in the driveway.

INT. ALEX'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Alex enters the living room.

ALEX
Hello?

At the rear of the house his parents sit at the dining table. He drops his backpack and approaches.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Dad! Where were you?

He slows. Something’s off. His parents stare at the table with dull eyes. His father takes a long beat before letting his gaze drift to Alex.

DAD
Hey bud. ... How was school?

His father’s gaze returns to the bare table before him.

ALEX
What’s wrong?

No response.

GLADYS steps from the kitchen.

She's DIFFERENT. Her face has color. Her eyes have a twinkle and she's spry on her feet. She wears a bright jumpsuit and is drying a plate with a rag.

GLADYS
Alex! Welcome home!

He stares, dumbstruck.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
How are you sweetie?

She beams at him.

ALEX
Mom? Dad?

They don't look up. Gladys squats before him.

GLADYS
Let me get a look at you! I haven't seen you since you were a baby!

ALEX
What's wrong with my parents?

She smiles and cocks her head as if this were a silly question.

GLADYS
Nothing, sweetheart! They're *fine!*

He pulls back from her and stares at his parents.

ALEX
Mom! MOM!

She looks up slowly.

MOM
Hey... How was school?

GLADYS
See? They're just fine!

He recoils from her and stares coldly. She hardens.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Alex! Now don't be rude.

His breathing deepens. He wants to cry but he fights it.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Why don’t you go get yourself washed up and I’ll start making you some supper?

He backs away from her and runs up the stairs.

LATER: Alex sits at the dinner table. Gladys sits across from him happily eating from her plate. His parents sit as before, staring at the empty table. Gladys hasn’t bothered to serve them anything.

Alex glowers. There’s clearly been no conversation happening.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
You aren’t hungry?

He glares at her.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Sweetheart eat your food or it’s going to get cold.

A tear rolls down his face. He clenches his jaw.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
(firm)
If you aren’t going to eat you can just go on up to bed.

He stands and FLINGS HIS WATER into his DAD’S FACE.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Alex!

His father slowly raises a hand wipes at his cheek. His eyes never leave the table.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Now what on *earth* was that for?

ALEX
DAD!

GLADYS
That’s it! Go straight upstairs and wash your face and brush your teeth and then it’s bedtime.

He stares daggers at her, tears coming.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
I’m not kidding young man. Go!

He storms upstairs.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alex lays in bed, eyes wide, tears running down his face.

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Alex moves past Gladys's open door. Her room is empty.

He creeps downstairs. All is quiet.

DOWNSTAIRS: His parents haven't moved from the table. Their posture is more slumped, their jaws slack, drool oozes from their open mouths.

Between them Gladys sits at the head of the table. She eyes him, coldly.

GLADYS
Come. Sit.

He doesn't move.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
(icy, firm)
Alex? Sit.

He moves to the table and sits opposite her.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Don't worry about your parents Alex. They're only resting.

He scowls.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Before you go to school today, I want you to promise me that you will not tell a soul that I am here or that your parents are resting like they are. Do you hear me?

He doesn't answer.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Watch.

She pulls from her lap a small stick wrapped in human hair.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Watching?

She SNAPS THE STICK in half and his parents act in unison. They each SNATCH A FORK from the table and STAB THEMSELVES IN THE FACE, hard and repeatedly.

Thwack thwack thwack thwack ...

Again and again they drive their forks into their cheeks. Tiny red holes soon form rivulets of BLOOD that cling to their hands and run down their necks.

ALEX
STOP!

Alex moves to his father, grabbing for his hands but it’s no use. He keeps smashing the fork into his face.

ALEX (CONT'D)
STOP! DAD!

GLADYS
Alex?

She places the BROKEN STICK into a BOWL OF WATER and his parents immediately put the forks on the table.

He stares at her in horror.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Now. When I tell you that you will not speak a word about me or your parents to anyone, you understand what can happen if you break your promise. I can have your parents hurt themselves. I can have them hurt each other. I can have them *eat* each other if I want to. Do you believe me?

He nods.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Promise me that you will not speak about me to another human being. Say it.

ALEX
I promise.

GLADYS
I’ll know if you do Alex.

He stares.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Go to school. Take the bus home.

INT. BUS - MORNING

Alex rides the bus, staring out the window.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Alex sits despondent as Justine lectures.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Alex walks home from the bus stop.

INT. ALEX'S HOUSE - DAY

Alex enters and sees his parents sitting on the couch. The windows have all been covered in cardboard and newspaper and it's dark in here.

Gladys is nowhere to be found.

UPSTAIRS: Alex creeps to the top of the steps and moves toward the open door to the guest room.

It's empty.

At the end of the hall the door to his parents' room is cracked open and we can see that the room within is lit by candles.

Alex approaches and peeks inside.

Gladys has moved the furniture, somehow turning the bed on its side and bracing it over the windows.

She sits cross legged in the center of the floor. Before her, sits the small POTTED TREE. Beside it sit little clusters of sticks tied together with string and hair. Other odds and ends are spread out and five candles surround her and her collection of items.

GLADYS
No talking today. Good boy.

He says nothing.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
You'll need to feed your parents.
There's soup in the cabinet.
Tomorrow you'll get more.

LIVING ROOM: Alex spoon feeds soup into his unresponsive parents' mouths.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Alex sits and listens.

INT. BUS - DAY

Alex rides the bus.

INT. SHOP - DAY

Alex loads cans of soup from the shelf into his basket.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

He walks home overloaded with his backpack and his groceries.

INT. ALEX'S HOUSE - NIGHT

LIVING ROOM: Alex SPOON FEEDS his parents SOUP. They look sicker and frailer than before.

UPSTAIRS HALLWAY: Alex observes Gladys (looking healthier than ever) through the open door, sitting on the floor of his parents' bedroom. She's surrounded by candles and is squeezing BLOOD from her hand onto the LITTLE POTTED TREE.

BEDROOM: Alex wakes in the middle of the night and gasps when he sees Gladys at the foot of his bed, watching him sleep.

He sits up with alarm, but she doesn't even move. Just casually eyes him.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Alex makes himself a sandwich and loads it into a brown bag.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Alex eats the sandwich by himself at the end of a table.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Alex sits at his desk as Justine lectures.

JUSTINE
Valentine's day is coming up Friday! Remind your parents to get cards for everyone. Our card exchange will be at the beginning of the day Friday, and yes you do need to get a card for *everybody* in the class. Also we're going to have a substitute next week on Monday so the Math test is going to be--

INT. SHOP - DAY

Alex BUYS more CANS OF SOUP.

-- Alex stands in the card aisle pulling VALENTINE'S CARDS from the shelf and dropping them in his basket.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Alex walks home. He mounts the steps as his Father opens the door. He steps in and the door shuts behind him.

INT. ALEX'S HOUSE - NIGHT

ALEX'S BEDROOM: Alex has the CARDS spread out on his desk, signing his name, one by one.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

VALENTINE'S CARDS are passed out and received. Smiling kids open little red envelopes and stuff candy in their mouths.

MATTHEW opens his card and makes a barf face.

Alex looks over his and almost tears up at the little notes of love.

INT. ALEX'S HOUSE - NIGHT

BEDROOM: Alex wakes in his bed. Something's wrong. He sits up and sees his door is open.

STAIRCASE: He creeps down the steps. The living room below is faintly lit by candles.

DOWNSTAIRS: Gladys sits at the head of the table lost in some intimate chant.

Alex enters slowly, taking in the scene. Arranged on the table in front of her are all 17 of his VALENTINE'S CARDS. Each one is cut into little pieces that sit in their own pile. Next to each pile is a LITTLE CANDLE and a small CUP of BROWN LIQUID.

On a large plate in front of Gladys is a pile of leaves and paper that presumably contains pieces of each card.

ALEX
My cards.

Gladys opens her eyes and shoots a look ordering silence.

She picks up a candle, SPITS a wet GLOB OF SALIVA into the pile of paper and leaves, and holds the flame to it.

Whoooooshhh!

The fire catches and the contents of the plate IGNITE.

CU: The clock behind her reads 2:17.

EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

CHILDREN running through the dark. First by themselves, then MERGING INTO GROUPS.

INT. ALEX'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Gladys walks Alex to the front door and pulls it open. They stand side by side looking out into the dark of the neighborhood.

The street before them is dark and silent. Nothing but leaves shifting in the breeze. Until...

A FIGURE at the far end of the block emerges, with ARMS OUTSTRETCHED, running from the shadows STRAIGHT FOR THEM.

Alex gasps. Behind that, ANOTHER CHILD emerges.

GLADYS
Here they come.

Then another. The first child comes rushing up the lawn, it's face blank as it zips between Alex and Gladys.

It moves through the house and stops robotically in front of the dining room table. Alex looks back out to the yard and here come some SEVEN MORE CHILDREN.

Gladys smiles.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Alex sits at his desk. Pull back to reveal an EMPTY CLASSROOM. Justine enters and sets her bag on the desk with a bewildered look on her face.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE - DAY

Alex sits on a couch as various suited adults bustle around him, clearly the alarm bells have been rung.

INT. ALEX'S HOUSE - DAY

BATHROOM: Gladys SHAVES his FATHERS FACE and COMBS HIS HAIR. She's wearing a brightly colored outfit and makeup.

LIVING ROOM: Alex's father stands by the front door, vacant as ever but all cleaned up. Alex watches as Gladys kneels beside his mother on the couch. Gladys places a KNIFE in her hand and lifts it so that she's HOLDING THE BLADE TO HER OWN THROAT.

Gladys shoots Alex a look of warning.

GLADYS
One word.

INT. CAR - LATER

Alex rides in the back as Gladys drives and his father sits shotgun.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Alex sits between Gladys and his father opposite two detectives.

GLADYS
... Yes, Jim here suffered a stroke a little while back so he's unable to speak. I'm taking care of the family for the time being.

DETECTIVE
I understand. Glad you both are here. Alex how you doing pal?

Alex looks up.

ALEX
I'm OK.

DETECTIVE
We're gonna ask you some questions about what happened at school OK? We're looking real hard to find all your friends and any help you could give us would make a lot of worried parents real happy. You got any idea where everybody went?

Alex shakes his head.

ALEX
No idea?

He shakes his head again.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

LIVING ROOM: Alex SPOON-FEEDS his PARENTS on the couch.

BASEMENT: Alex SPOON-FEEDS the CHILDREN in the dark. Currently it's MATTHEW'S TURN. He dabs at his chin for him.

PARENTS ROOM: Alex watch Gladys harvest a stick from the tree, with the care of a surgeon performing an amputation.

GLADYS
Tomorrow people will come here and they will search this house. We have to be ready.

BASEMENT: Gladys and Alex cut samples of hair from each child in the basement.

DINING ROOM: Alex watches Gladys WRAP ALL OF THE HAIRS around a SINGLE LONG STICK.

BACKYARD - NIGHT: Gladys opens the door and the CHILDREN RUSH silently in a stream out into the yard. They hop the fence and flow INTO THE WOODS beyond.

LIVING ROOM - DAY: Men in suits step into the freshly cleaned living room. Gladys smiles and welcomes them in.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Alex sits with DIFFERENT CHILDREN in a DIFFERENT CLASSROOM.

INT. BUS - DAY

Alex rides the bus home.

DOWNSTAIRS: He spoon-feeds his parents.

BASEMENT: He spoon-feeds the children.

CLASSROOM: Alex sits at his desk.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Alex walks home from school. Suddenly, JUSTINE step out of a parked car.

JUSTINE
Alex! Hi.

Alex freezes. Just over her shoulder is his house. He scans the windows but sees no sign of Gladys watching.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
How are you?

His fights panic.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
I wanted to say hi cause... I've been thinking about you a lot and I wanted to make sure you're OK.

ALEX
I'm OK.

JUSTINE
Yeah? Cause I know this has been a really hard time for me and I can't imagine how it must have been for--

ALEX
I have to go.

He walks past her.

JUSTINE
Hey. Hang on please.

He doesn't stop. He's focused on the UPPER WINDOWS of his house and sure enough, in the dark rectangle of his bedroom window he sees GLADYS' PALE FACE.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Alex! I just want to make sure you're alright! I just want to make sure everything at home is--

Alex whirls on her.

ALEX
DON'T FOLLOW ME!

She freezes. Alex turns and runs across the yard. He scales the steps as his Father opens the front door.

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Alex steps in. His Father shuts the door.

Alex moves to the foot of the steps and looks up.

ALEX
I didn't say anything!

He drops the groceries and runs up the steps when...

Ding Dong.

He freezes midway up, afraid to move a muscle. He cranes to peek over the railing at the front door.

Ding Dong.

He looks up to see Gladys standing at the top of the stairs. Her expression is pure threat.

JUSTINE (O.S.)
Hello?

Alex pleads with his eyes. *I said nothing!*

She scowls and descends the steps.

She slides past him and Alex moves fearfully to the top of the stairs, and watches her disappear into the living room.

Then he sees... She left the door to his parents room open.

He takes a few steps toward the open door eying the setup. The potted plant sits on the floor.

Arranged around it are the two sticks for his mother and father - hers wrapped in a silk scarf, his wrapped with a necktie.

Between them in a prominent position is the LARGE STICK WRAPPED IN THE MANY LOCKS OF CHILDRENS' HAIR. He leans over the banister to check but Gladys is nowhere to be seen.

Alex steels himself, fixes his gaze on the plant and enters his parents room.

He steps nimbly over the relics and squats at the tree. He reaches delicately for a little limb...

BUS: He rides to school.

STORE: He buys groceries.

FRONT YARD: He carries them home.

LIVING ROOM: Alex carries in the groceries and notices immediately that the COUCH is EMPTY. Where are his parents?

He sets down the groceries and steps deeper in.

ALEX
Hello?

Alex scans the room and spots...

PAUL standing in the shadows of the rear of the room, still and silent. Alex takes a fearful step back and almost walks into...

ANTHONY standing behind him.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Ahhh!!

Alex scurries to the foot of the steps and sees Gladys standing at the top.

GLADYS
Look at the mess I had to take care of while you were gone.

She glares at him and then walks toward his parents room.

ALEX
Who are they?

He stares fearfully at Anthony and Paul - their faces twisted in that familiar way.

He moves to the top of the stairs and sees his PARENTS standing sentinel, side by side outside the open door to their (now Gladys's) bedroom. Gladys moves between them.

GLADYS
Don't step over the salt.

She shuts the door. Alex looks down and sees a LINE OF SALT stretching across the hallway in front of them.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

He sits up in bed. He moves to the window, looks out and sees Archer's truck parked on the street outside.

EXT. ALEX'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Justine and Archer sit in his truck watching Alex's house.

JUSTINE
Well?

ARCHER
Well let's knock and see what we get maybe?

JUSTINE
I have knocked. I don't think they're just going to open up and and invite us in.

ARCHER
You wanna call the cops? I don't think they're gonna act too quick. We should just knock.

JUSTINE
OK Let's--

The front door opens.

ARCHER
Here we go. What is this now?

They watch the dark of the doorway. After a long beat a figure emerges.

The person takes a slow step from the dark of the house.

It's PAUL. He stands still - vacant.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Is that a cop?

JUSTINE
That’s Paul!

ARCHER
You know him?

JUSTINE
I... Yes! What is he...?

Paul raises an arm and slowly makes a ‘come here’ gesture.

They stare.

He beckons again and steps back into the house.

ARCHER
That was...

They look at each other.

INT. ALEX’S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alex watches Justine and Archer exit the truck and approach the house.

He hops off his bed and moves to the bedroom door. He cracks it open and peeks out.

At the other end of the hall the dark shapes of his MOTHER and FATHER stand guard at Gladys’s door.

He shuts his door and grabs a HAMMER off his desk.

He steps back, takes a deep breath and swings the hammer into the door.

BANG. It makes a fist sized dent. He winds up again.

BANG. The hammer punches all the way through. He chips at the HOLE making it larger until it’s the size of a softball.

He kneels and peeks through. His parents haven’t moved.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Archer and Justine step inside. They linger in the foyer letting their eyes adjust to the dark.

ARCHER
Hello?

No sound. Just the large cluttered maze of shadows.

JUSTINE
(whisper)
There!

Archer squints to see PAUL standing near the rear of the room.

He raises a clumsy hand and beckons her forward once more.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Paul?

No answer.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Paul what are you doing back there?

Justine steps past Archer and crosses the room toward Paul.

ARCHER
Wait...

JUSTINE
Paul, what are you--

ANTHONY
GGGAAAAAUAUUUGGHGH!!

To Archer’s side ANTHONY HURLS HIMSELF out of the darkness and LEAPS ONTO HIM.

As Justine reacts, PAUL RUSHES at her.

PAUL
AAAAAUUUGGHH!!

They collide.

UPSTAIRS HALL: Sounds of combat drift up from below but Alex ignores it. He STEPS to the EDGE of the SALT BOUNDARY.

His mother and father make no move.

He takes a deep breath and STEPS ACROSS THE SALT LINE.

His parents spring into action and SPRINT AT HIM.

DOWNSTAIRS: Anthony is on top of Archer, scratching and punching at his face. To his side Archer sees that Justine is in a similar situation with Paul.

Paul grips Justine's face and his thumb slides into her mouth. She bites down. Blood spurts but Paul shows no pain, just snarling rage.

She gets a foot planted under Paul's chest and launches him up and back, onto his feet. As he finds his balance and prepares to lunge again, she hops up and runs toward the kitchen.

He chases.

She snatches a PAN from the stove and hurls it at him, bouncing off his face with a BOING but not slowing him down at all.

She maneuvers herself around the island.

Paul jukes left and right, anticipating her movement.

JUSTINE
Stay fucking back!

BEDROOM: Alex slips into his room and slams the door, locking the knob as his parents slam into the door. He braces the chair against it.

He steps back as his parents rage outside, Jiggling the knob and punching at the wood.

ALEX
(sotto)
Come on...

He watches the hinges, praying they don't give way. The pounding is deafening.

He eyes the HOLE IN THE DOOR.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Come on!

Finally HIS FATHER'S ARM comes slithering THROUGH THE HOLE in the door, reaching for Alex.

Alex springs into action, SEIZING HIS FATHERS ARM with both hands and SINKING HIS TEETH in.

The next moment BLOOD flows from the arm spattering onto the chair below.

Alex snatches from his desk a STOLEN STICK FROM THE TREE, wrapped with a NECKTIE and GOLD CHAIN, and rubs it against the wound coating it in blood.

Then he steps back and ... SNAPS IT.

The bleeding arm recoils back through the hole in the door and the sounds of struggle change shape.

His parents are now FIGHTING EACH OTHER.

DOWNSTAIRS: ARCHER punches ANTHONY repeatedly in the face and miraculously manages to get the zombified Junkie off balance enough to worm his way out from under him.

Archer pulls himself to his feet but Anthony is up a moment later and throws himself at ARCHER and the two men stagger together SMASHING THEIR WAY THROUGH THE BASEMENT DOOR.

Archer falls onto the landing with Anthony on top of him attacking with renewed energy.

Archer gags and writhes against him and as he struggles for air, he catches sight of...

The CHILDREN. They stand in a loose unconscious crowd.

Archers eyes go wide in disbelief.

KITCHEN: Paul hisses at Justine from across the island. She reaches for the nearest object on the counter behind her and snatches up... a rectangular CHEESE GRATER.

She brandishes it like a knife.

JUSTINE
Stay back! Paul!

Paul LUNGES UP ONTO THE ISLAND and scampers toward her, leaping, horizontal - arms outstretched, smashing into her.

Justine manages to stay on her feet as Paul grapples with her. She PRESSES THE CHEESE GRATER AGAINST HIS FACE and *shuuuck* JERKS IT UPWARD peeling the skin from his cheek and nose in little white ribbons.

Paul shows no sign of pain. He throws a punch at her head, which she dodges and his fist smashes through the cabinet shattering the glasses inside.

Justine smashes the grater to his face again *shuuuuck* rips another grid of skin from his chin and lips.

Paul smacks it from her hands and it goes clattering against a far wall. He grabs her with both hands at the back of her neck and leans in to bite her, his newly tattered lips revealing more teeth than normal.

Justine manages to hold him off with one hand pressed against his face. For an awkward beat they struggle like two wrestlers, or some strange sexual assault.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Paul... Paul please.

He gnashes his teeth, inching closer to her face, pulling harder against her neck with both hands.

And then with her left hand she raises... HIS SERVICE PISTOL. She's unholstered it where we hadn't been able to see. She presses it to his throat and...

BANG. Blood gushes from his neck in red pulses, but his face remains a mask of rage. He still pulls at her.

She raises the gun to his temple.

UPSTAIRS: Alex throws the door open to see his parents fighting in the hallway. He rushes toward them. His mother reaching for him as his father grapples with her against the wall.

He presses himself against the opposite wall and slides past them toward Gladys' room.

BANG! A gunshot from downstairs. He flinches but presses on.

BASEMENT LANDING: Archer, still flat on his back struggles against Anthony who straddles him and claws at him like a--

BANG!

Anthony's head comes apart and his body slumps forwards revealing Justine standing in the doorway, aiming the gun.

Archer shoves Anthony aside and immediately makes his way down to the children below.

Justine stares at Anthony's body. She leans on the door frame and turns back toward the kitchen where Paul's legs poke through the doorway.

What have I done?

She drops the gun.

UPSTAIRS: Alex pushes Gladys's door to see an...

EMPTY ROOM. Just her knick knacks, candles and ephemera.

No Gladys.

BASEMENT: Archer reaches the bottom of the steps, gawking at the eerily still children in the dark.

ARCHER
Matthew?

None of them respond.

He grabs a nearby little boy and pulls him into the light. *Not Matthew.*

ARCHER (CONT'D)
Matthew!

He moves deeper into the dark grabbing children, craning to see the faces.

UPSTAIRS: Alex takes a cautious step into Gladys' room. In his hand he grips tight the stick that controls his parents. He inches deeper into the room craning to look into the bathroom...

No Gladys.

Where could she be?

KITCHEN: Paul lays face down on the tile, with blood pooling around his head. Justine crosses the room and kneels beside him, placing a loving hand to his back.

JUSTINE
Oh my God...

PUSH IN on Paul. We're sure he's going to reanimate in some terrible way.

BASEMENT: Archer moves among the children. He digs out his phone, turning on its flashlight.

ARCHER
Matthew?

He moves deeper into the dark. Shining his light on strange face after strange face until...

GLADYS
AAAAAAUUUGGGHHH!!!!

GLADYS LUNGES from within the crowd. Quick as lightning she SMEARS BLOOD ON HIS FACE.

KITCHEN: Justine rolls PAUL onto his back. The wound in his head is severe.

JUSTINE
Oh my--

She whirls to see the door behind her BURSTS OPEN and Archer appears in the darkness, eyes bulging, mouth slack, lethal and vacant.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
No...

He lunges, slamming her into the wall. He wraps his hands around her throat and squeezes.

Gladys appears in the doorway behind him, smiling and wrapping a cloth around her bleeding hand.

GLADYS
That’s good. Just like that.

She steps lazily up to watch Justine writhe and gag against Archer’s grip.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
That’s the way.

UPSTAIRS: Behind Alex his parents’ struggle reaches the doorway. He turns fearfully to see them grappling in a bloody frenzy, his mother’s eyes locked onto him, his father, wrapped around her like a boa, biting her arms.

Alex rushes into the master bathroom. He drops the sticks controlling his parents IN THE TOILET and on cue, they collapse to the ground, wheezing for life.

He steps back into the room and snatches the stick with the hair of the children from the ground in front of the little black tree. He kneels and BITES HIS OWN HAND as hard as he can. He SQUEEZES THE BLOOD ONTO THE STICK, Snatches Gladys cancer wig, wraps it around the wood, takes a deep breath and then...

Snaps it.

DOWNSTAIRS: A rumbling sound. Gladys whips her head around.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
No...

BOOM! The children come exploding out of the basement like a single organism.

Gladys sprints out the back door.

EXT. ALEX'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

As Gladys flails her way down the steps and across the yard the children EXPLODE THROUGH WINDOWS, SMASH THROUGH THE DOORWAY - some falling, some leaping over the fallen.

Gladys hops over the wooden fence clumsily and now she's running through the neighbor's yard.

The children move like a freight train HITTING THE FENCE behind her like a tiny riot, PILING THEMSELVES AGAINST IT till the WOOD BREAKS. Some from the rear simply run up the pile of kids and leap over into the lawn after her.

In a few steps Gladys comes to the rear of the next house and she bounds inside the unlocked back door.

INT. NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

She slams the door shut and throws the lock.

She rushes through the living room of this house but the kids come smashing through the rear windows after her.

GLADYS
Aaaaaahhh!!!

CHILDREN
AAAAUUUUUGGGHGHHHHH!!!!!!

She's through the house and out the front door.

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Gladys sprints out into the yard but the STAMPEDE OF KIDS comes blasting out of every orifice of the house, exploding through doors and windows.

They catch her before she reaches the street and leap upon her like a pack of rabid wolves bringing down a stag. In an instant she's on the ground swarmed by 17 shrieking children who BITE and TEAR at her with level 10 ferocity.

Some pull her hair, some gouge at her eyes, some pull her wrists and some her ankles.

Soon parts of her come loose. Her face is reduced to pulp, someone bites off an ear.

She's lifted off the ground by their collective pulls like a woman being drawn and quartered.

Children leap onto the pack from the edges til it's just a bloody scrum with pieces of her coming loose in the frenzy.

At some point she stops screaming.

INT. ALEX'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The rage on Archer's face dissolves. His hands loosen from Justine's throat. She gasps. He relaxes and drops her and staggers outside.

EXT. YARD - CONTINUOUS

Archer staggers and then begins to run, following the carnage the children left. We follow him past the broken fence.

ARCHER
Matthew?

INT. ALEX'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Justine limps her way up the stairs.

JUSTINE
Alex?

INT. NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Archer pushes into the rear of the house, through the now destroyed living room where another bewildered family takes stock of the wreckage and out into...

EXT. FRONT YARD - DAY

Archer stops at the doorstep taking in the scene.

INT. ALEX'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Justine climbs to the top of the stairs resting finally with her elbows on the top landing. She looks down the hall toward the doorway of Gladys's room, where Alex's Mother and Father lay in a daze.

Alex appears, kneels and wraps his arms around them both.

Push in on Justine. She almost lets herself smile.

EXT. NEIGHBORS YARD - CONTINUOUS

Archer stares at the front yard where 17 children stand idly, covered in blood.

ARCHER
Matthew?

One child among them turns slowly and looks at him.

Archer beams.

He runs to his bloody child, scoops him up and holds him tight.

ARCHER (CONT'D)
I found you.

Push in on Archer as he carries his son down the block, away from the gore and the mayhem. A joyful tear runs down his face.

INT. ALEX'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Alex hugs his parents tight.

PUSH IN ON THEIR FACES - they stare absently at the wall behind him.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

PUSH IN on a blood covered Matthew, pressed against his fathers neck.

His eyes are open but they are vacant.

Empty.

THE END.